

THE SAINTS



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The Saints

SAINT CLOTILDA



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SAINT CLOTILDA

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BY

GODEFROI KURTH

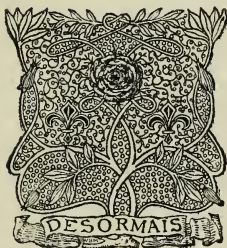
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EDITOR'S PREFACE

NONE have less to fear from a conscientious application of the historical and critical methods than have Catholics. That many of them show a disposition to shrink nervously from the operation may be ascribed partly to that same feebleness of faith which so often makes the Christian put his trust in physical force, or in wealth, or craft, or intellectual subtlety for the defence of the Church, as though she had been created or sustained by these things, or could ever be overthrown by their means; but it is also due to a reluctance on the part of the imagination to destroy much that it has laboriously built up, to part with its favourite pictures, to discard old words and symbols and expressions, and to learn new ones. The imagination is a more conservative faculty than the understanding, upon whose mobility it acts as a check, mostly for good, but at times, no doubt, for ill; we change our judgment quickly enough, but the imagination takes a long time to adapt itself to a new truth; there, what we know to be past still lingers as present, and what has been proved false still figures as reality. A well-instructed Catholic is quite aware of the clear distinction between what is an essential part of the Church's dogmatic teaching and what belongs to

that unsorted mass of pious tradition which she reverences and preserves for the sake of the yet unsevered grains of truth it contains, but which she recognises at its true value and gives to us not as history and theology but as popular tradition and opinion. Yet, though admitting this notorious distinction, we sometimes resent the disturbance of our long-cherished and familiar fancies as much as we should an assault upon our faith, and are disposed to regard the iconoclastic critic as next door to a heretic. No doubt such criticism has often been undertaken with hostile intent, or, at least, in a carping illiberal spirit, but it has over and over again been the work of those renowned, not only for their orthodoxy, but for their sanctity. It is not always the time for weeding, but weeding no less than sowing has its time, namely, when it bids fair to choke the good seed. Short of that it may be expedient to suffer tares and wheat to grow side by side lest the truth come away with the error; but the scandal of a critical age and that of an uncritical age are diametrically opposite and the offence given by an excessive credulity in the one case is as great as that given by undue scepticism in the other.

It is more especially in regard to the lives of the saints that we must prepare our imagination for the same kind of shock which it has to bear, though with less difficulty, in respect to secular biography or history. But, in truth, as Professor Kurth insists in the appendix to this volume, the saints have nothing to lose and everything to gain from being treated as St Clotilda has been here treated. For

in the light of historical criticism her character is revealed as possessing "an unity and a sincerity which were lacking in the traditional portrait, in which she made her appearance at a given moment in the rôle of a virago thirsting for blood." The truth thus reconstructed is "of higher value than the legend," and "the tender figure of our Saint has recovered the halo whose brightness has been dimmed by irreverent traditions."

We have lately seen a reproduction of a portrait from life of St Catherine of Genoa set side by side with the conventional vulgarity. "How human! How modern!" is the first comment suggested to every mind; in other words, "How understandable! How sympathetic!" Yet what the saints have suffered at the hands of artists is not worthy to be compared with the great weight of injury which has been inflicted upon them by uncritical hagiography. To portray the saint as he was commonly understood by his time or as he exists in popular tradition, is to credit the majority with greater judgment and discrimination than it ever possesses. A great hero or statesman is deservedly revered by the crowd as one worthy of their worship, and forthwith they ascribe to him all that to their mind constitutes greatness and goodness. Well-meant as their picture of him may be, it is none the less grotesque and untruthful. Had his been a greatness after their mind, he would never have won their worship, for we worship what is greater and better than our own ideal. The devout peasant thinks to add splendour to some divinely conceived present-

ment of the Madonna by a crown of tinsel and spangles of coloured glass, having no eye for the beauty which he buries beneath all this frippery. A less inadequate taste while respecting his attention will set aside his judgment. To a bloody-minded and barbarous people, in a state of spiritual infancy, how could Clotilda, the great and the good, lack any element necessary to their crude ideal; how could she be otherwise than vengeful, if vengeance were a point of honour, and if to forgive were weakness and cowardice? As surely as the mind of childhood has got its stereotyped king and queen and prince, ever crowned in high state and radiant with gold, so surely has the childlike multitude certain moulds into which every hero or saint must be pressed unless the public imagination is to be pained and shocked. We see the same law of fashion at work everywhere; music has its cadences and endings which cannot be altered without outrage to the expectant public ear, and many a novelist has been censured for leaving the well-trodden lines of convention in favour of a conclusion truer to the prosaic and painful realities of everyday life. The mind craves for rhythm and repetition as well as for novelty and variety, and indeed it is only by their combination that it can be really soothed and satisfied. It must, like the Liturgy, have its "Common of Saints" as well as its "Proper of Saints," its unity as well as its diversity. Without some such mould or form it could not tie facts together, or receive them under any sort of category; so that while we recognise this law as being often a source of danger

to the interests of historical truth, we must also acknowledge its necessity and utility. At the worst it means that the human mind is very limited and grows true very slowly.

It was because Christ could not possibly be fitted into the contemporary messianic mould that He was rejected by the Jews. Since that time He has made more room for Himself in the general mind, and has changed the ideal of civilised nations more to His own pattern, but who shall say that there is any finality in the matter, or that we have yet learnt all Christ—that we have exhausted the Gospel and left it behind? The saints are those in whom Christ lives again, the same Spirit, yet another life and form—and therefore they are necessarily beyond the full comprehension not only of a rude age but of every age; for advance in culture is not advance in sanctity. Still, as the ethical perceptions of our intellect grow truer to the Christian ideal, it will be more needful for us to strip from the traditional pictures of the saints those gauds and paltry splendours with which ruder though perhaps more loving hands than ours have adorned them, and to disclose the underlying sweetness of the human expression preserved for us by the very gilding and varnish under which it was providentially buried,—the replica of His face, who, if He is very God, is also very Man.

G. T.

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SAINT CLOTILDA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

THE part played by women in the conversion of nations to the Gospel, suggests one of the most beautiful aspects of the history of Christianity. Nowhere do their real strength and their apparent weakness stand out in so touching a contrast.

At first sight we might be tempted to believe that the fortunes of Catholic society and the great interests of the Christian world have been decided quite independently of any participation of the female sex. The Church has excluded women from the sacerdotal office, and has even commanded them, by the voice of the Apostle, to keep silence in the company of the faithful. She has not called them to any share in her world-wide cares. She has abstained from burdening their feeble shoulders with the heavy weight of the apostolate, and when, at a given moment, she confided to them certain functions, these were the humblest of all: the duties of deaconesses or servants. By sweeping them aside from the great stage of history, by confining them to their own firesides in the name of the dignity of their sex,

it would seem as though she had limited their social influence within the measure of their slender responsibilities.

Christian women accepted with joy the humble rôle assigned to them by the Church. They gloried in their obscurity, and they constituted themselves the zealous guardians of the barriers within which the Christian law confined their activities. But although restricted within their immediate circle, imprisoned within the narrow limits of domestic life, their apostolate has not been lacking in fertility. More than once, in the decisive crises of the world's history, it has happened that the helm of the social ship has been in their keeping, and it has been by their feeble hands that the vessel has been steered towards the shining lighthouse of eternal truth. Wherever the faith of Christ has triumphed, women have had a share in the victory. They have conquered the world from the seclusion of their homes, by converting their husbands, by instructing their children. By the very fact of their wifeness and their motherhood, they have been the co-workers with Providence in the education of nations. The establishment of the kingdom of God in modern Europe is, in a great measure, due to their patient and ceaseless devotion.

"The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife."¹ It is, in a sense, on these touching and significant words that the Church has based the apostolate of woman. We meet with them more than once on the lips of priests exhorting Christian

¹ 2 Corinthians vii. 14.

wives, and through the course of centuries they have consoled, encouraged and fortified the humble guardians of the domestic hearth. Let us recall the suave words and the tender accent with which they are commented on by one of the doctors of the fourth century. Writing to a great Roman lady on the education of her daughter, St Jerome allows her to hope that the child may one day become the instrument of the conversion of her grandfather, whose soul was still sunk in the darkness of paganism. "Who would have thought," he writes, "that the grand-daughter of the pontiff Albinus would be born of the vow of a Christian mother, that her baby lips would stammer the praises of Christ in the presence of her delighted grandfather, and that the aged heathen would clasp in his arms a Christian virgin? No, our expectation has not been vain. This old man who is surrounded by an escort of Christian sons and grandsons, is already a candidate of our Faith." And, continuing to expound to the mother his scheme of education, the Saint expresses the hope that the child will grow up to be the good angel of her grandfather, that she will sit on his knees and clasp him round the neck whenever she sees him, and that she will sing in his ears *Alleluia*.¹

In this letter St Jerome has to a great extent revealed the secret of the conversion of the Roman world. It was the Christian women who were the introducers of Jesus Christ to the hearth of the ancient consular families. It was they who whispered in familiar converse, or who taught by the still

¹ St Jerome, *Epistolae*, 107 (*ad Laetam*).

more persuasive method of personal example, the doctrines fallen from the lips of the Apostle. His voice had been heard but once, ere the hand of the executioner had silenced it for ever. But it had found an echo which was prolonged in accents of infinite sweetness from the lips of the Christian women who had been among his hearers. Who can define the limits of this domestic apostolate, of this indefatigable propaganda which was never more efficacious than when its promoters appeared to have renounced all conquering ambitions? One thing is certain, that from the very first day of the preaching of the Gospel women have rivalled men by their faith and courage: inferior in other respects, they proved themselves their equals in the face of martyrdom, and they won for their sex an honourable rank which has never since been called in question.

There came a moment in history when the mission of women took upon itself truly noble proportions: the moment when, the whole civilised world having fallen into ruin, a new world had to be built up out of the elements of the barbarian races. At that time, turning towards the latter, the Church saw before her only heathens and Arians, but she found her auxiliaries among their women. Christian and Catholic queens were seated on barbarian thrones, and it was they who prepared the way for the missionaries.

To sketch in a rapid survey all that civilisation owes to Christian queens, is to exhibit in its true light the historic importance of Queen Clotilda.

She heads the long line of chosen women, who at the dawn of the modern world were the leaders and teachers of nations. The first in regard to chronological order, she is also the first by the surprising magnitude of the work in which she was called to bear a part. The conversion of the Franks, the glory of which she shares with the great Bishop of Reims, altered the centre of gravity of history: it caused the sceptre of the West to pass into the hands of the Catholic Church, and it assured to the new converts throughout a long series of ages a foremost place in the annals of civilisation. Converted to Christianity they gave an impulse to the rest of the barbarian world. Other nations entered the Church walking in their footsteps, and treading the path along which Clotilda had led the way.

Their neighbours across the Channel were the first to follow the Frankish example. In vain the Britons, with blind patriotism, had refused to carry the torch of faith among their savage conquerors: Catholic charity was more potent than national resentment, and missionaries from Rome initiated the Anglo-Saxons into the benefits of the Gospel. It was a woman who unlocked for them the doors of the island of Saints, and this woman was no other than the great grand-daughter of Clotilda. Bertha—for such was her name—had been given in marriage to King Ethelbert of Kent, on condition that she should be allowed the free exercise of her religion, and she lived for many years as a Christian at the pagan court of Canterbury, having as her chaplain and as the protector of her faith, accord-

ing to the expression of the chronicler, a Frankish bishop of the name of Luithard, who had followed her across the Channel.¹ An ancient Christian sanctuary situated on a hill outside the town, the Church of St Martin, served as a meeting-place for the little Christian colony. When St Augustine arrived at the head of his forty missionaries, he found in Queen Bertha a powerful auxiliary at the court of her husband. Ethelbert was ripe for conversion; he was the first to receive baptism in the kingdom of Kent, and he became an ardent and zealous propagator of the Gospel among his people.²

Initiated through the co-operation of a woman, the conversion of Britain to Christianity was accomplished by the same means. Ethelburga, the daughter of Ethelbert, by marrying King Edwin of Northumbria, carried the faith among the Angles of whom St Gregory the Great had desired to make angels. The young king had promised to respect the faith of his bride, and to grant her full facilities for the exercise of her religion. On this occasion also, a bishop, Paulinus, had accompanied the young Queen.³ Thus her little court constituted on the banks of the Humber an advance-guard of Christianity, and a luminous and edifying centre of Christian life. Ethelburga gained sufficient ascendancy over Edwin to induce him to consent to the baptism of their daughter, and he himself, a man of serious and

¹ The Ven. Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica Anglorum*, I. 25.

² The Ven. Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica Anglorum*, I. 25 and 26.

³ *Id.*, *op. cit.*, II. 9.

thoughtful mind, began to look with favourable eyes on the Christian law which surrounded him in his own household. It was about this time that two letters arrived from Rome, sent by the Pope Boniface, and addressed, one to Edwin himself exhorting him to take the decisive step, and the other to the Queen urging her forward in her apostolic work. The pontifical document is well worth reading, for it shows the extent to which the Church counted on the co-operation of women at that time, and how highly it appreciated their assistance. After having congratulated Ethelburga on her faith and deplored her husband's unbelief, the sovereign pontiff exhorts her to neglect no means by which a true marriage between her and Edwin may be brought about, and an end put to this divorce of souls perpetuated by the gloom of paganism. "Take courage, most worthy daughter; do not cease to implore of the divine mercy the favour of a perfect union between you and your husband, in order that through the unity of faith, you may be one soul as you are one body, and that after this life your union may be maintained in the life to come. Direct all your efforts to softening his heart by instilling into it the divine precepts; make him realise the sublimity of the faith that you profess, and how great is the gift of regeneration that you have deserved. Through you the words of Scripture must be verified in a striking manner: 'The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife.' You have only found grace in God's sight, in order that you may bring back in abund-

ance to your Redeemer the good fruits of the favours that you have received from Him.”¹

We know that the wishes of the pontiff were shortly fulfilled. Edwin accepted Christianity after much deliberation, and henceforward a ray of divine grace seemed to illumine the countenance of the noble-minded king.

Thus Christian women presided at the conversion of the chief pagan monarchs of the West. It was women also, as we shall see, who carried the Gospel to the Arian kingdoms of the Lombards and the Visigoths, and definitely established the power of the Catholic Church in Italy and in Spain.

For many years the eyes of the Roman Church had been turned towards Lombardy. When Clotsinda, the daughter of Clothair I., became the wife of the Lombard king Alboin, the moment seemed propitious for attempting the conversion of the nation, and it was to the Queen that the task was in the first instance entrusted. The letter has been preserved to us which, on this occasion, St Nizier of Treves addressed to the grand-daughter of Clotilda. In it the eager logic of the theologian is united to the sympathetic emotion of the spiritual father. “We entreat you by the Day of Judgment,” writes the bishop to the Queen, “to read this letter with all attention, and to explain its contents carefully and repeatedly to your spouse.” And after having furnished her with the arguments that he held to be most weighty in combating the Arian heresy, he continues:

¹ The Ven. Bede, *op. cit.*, II. 10 and 11.

“You have frequently heard how your grandmother Clotilda, of blessed memory, came to the kingdom of the Franks and how she brought King Clovis to the Catholic Faith. As he was a man of good understanding, he declined to accede to her wishes until he had fully grasped the truth of our doctrines. Once convinced, he prostrated himself before the tomb of St Martin, and promised to receive baptism without delay. You have been told of his subsequent exploits against the heretics Alaric and Gondebald; you cannot have forgotten the noble gifts that fell even in this world to the lot both of him and of his sons.

“I ask you then, why should not a mighty and illustrious prince such as King Alboin be converted, or at least why should he be so slow in seeking the path of salvation? I beseech Thee, oh God, who art the glory of the Saints and the salvation of all, pour down Thy Grace into his heart. And you, Queen Clotsinda, in your intercourse with him, come to our aid, in order that we may all rejoice with God in the conquest of so shining a star, so precious a pearl. I salute you with all fervour; I implore of you not to remain inactive; do not cease to lift up your voice, do not cease to sing the praises of God. You have heard the word, ‘The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife.’ Remember that our firmest hope of salvation and of the remission of our sins, rests upon the conversion of a sinner from his evil ways. Watch, watch; God is on our side; act, I beseech you, in such a way that, through you, the people of Lombardy may

become powerful against their enemies, and that we may all have cause to rejoice over your happiness and the prosperity of your spouse.”¹

This pathetic appeal from the bishop to the Christian queen remained for a time without response; Clotsinda died in the flower of her youth, and the second marriage of Alboin with Rosamond seemed likely to throw back the Lombards into their previous state of barbarism. But that which was denied to the grand-daughter of Clotilda was to be accomplished by another princess of the Frankish house.

There lived in Bavaria, towards the year 589, a princess renowned alike for her beauty and her virtues; this was Theodelind, daughter of Duke Garibald. Authari, king of the Lombards, fell in love with her, and obtained her hand in marriage. Popular poetry has seized upon their espousals and has woven the tale into one of those graceful nuptial legends of which we find an example in the history of Queen Clotilda herself.² Theodelind not only reigned in her husband's heart, but she gained the affections of the whole nation, so that when Authari died, the Lombards decided to elect as their king the prince on whom Queen Theodelind should decide to bestow her hand.³ Her choice fell on Duke Agilulf, and thus, Queen by a double right, she was able to occupy towards the papacy in the sixth century a position very similar to that of the Coun-

¹ *Monumenta Germaniae historica, Epistolae*, III. pp. 119-123.

² Paul Diacre, *Historia Langobardorum*, III. 30.

³ Paul Diacre, *op. cit.*, III. 35.

tess Matilda at a later date. It was she who arrested Agilulf in his victorious march towards Rome; the barbarian obeyed the voice of his wife, and Pope Gregory the Great wrote her a letter of thanks in which he declared that she had deserved well of those, whose blood would have been shed save for her intervention. Theodelind effected yet more: she converted her husband to the Catholic faith. The Cathedral of Monza, near Milan, where subsequently the coronation of all the Lombard kings took place, is the work of Theodelind, and the celebrated "Dialogues" of St Gregory the Great, bear on their title-page the name of the Queen. Like St Clotilda, Theodelind had the sorrow of owning, in the person of Adalwald, an unworthy son; but her life's work was immortal, and the converted Lombards remained one of the glories of the Catholic Church.¹

In the course of this same century, the pious Theodosia, daughter of the Greek governor of Betica, instructed the sons of the Arian Leovigild, king of the Visigoths, in the orthodox faith. Hermengild and Recared were taught devotion to the Catholic Church at their mother's knee, and these early lessons made an indelible impression on their minds. When, at a later date, their father married a fanatical Arian of the name of Goswintha, and showed himself a persecutor of the Catholics, Hermengild did not hesitate to make open profession of his faith. Supported and encouraged by his wife Ingonda, a great-grand-daughter of St Clotilda, he perished rather

¹ Paul Diaconus, *Hist. Langobardorum*, III. 30.

than abjure his faith, and Spain venerates in him one of her most glorious martyrs. His blood proved of marvellous fertility; hardly had his younger brother Recared ascended the throne, than he solemnly embraced Christianity, and the third Council of Toledo, held in 589, proclaimed to the whole world that Spain aspired to be a Catholic nation. This glorious title which she has continued to bear through fourteen centuries of a history rich in great deeds, was the price of the blood of Hermengild and the lessons of Theodosia. The Christian mother from her tomb had triumphed over the persecuting father.

The West was converted; henceforward her four most noble nations belonged to the Catholic Church; the hands of Christian women had severed the heavy chains of paganism, and had unwoven, stitch by stitch, the net of Arian heresy.

Turning our eyes in another quarter, we find a reproduction of the spectacle of which we have already been witnesses, among the four great romano-germanic nations. With the ninth century, the hour sounded for the admission of the Slav nations into the Church. Bohemia is the first to attract our attention. There the protector of the Christian faith was a princess of the name of Ludmilla, whom a grateful Church venerates on her altars. Converted towards the year 879, with her husband Boriwoï, by St Methodius, the great Apostle of the Slavs, she found herself exposed to every form of danger in the midst of a heathen people, more especially after the death of Boriwoï in 890 had left her without a protector. Her own sons

turned against her, and her daughter-in-law Drachomira, became her most cruel persecutor; but she never lost courage in the midst of her trials, and she succeeded in retaining in her own hands the education of her grandson Wenceslas, of whom she made a Saint as great as herself. It is difficult to decide between the rival claims to our admiration of grandmother and grandson, when we read the accounts of these noble-hearted rulers: she the persecuted woman whom nothing could shake; he the powerful prince whom nothing could seduce; she leading a life of prayer and vigils, of alms-giving and mortification; he raising with his own hand the wheat destined for the bread of the holy sacrifice, and refusing his signature to sentences of death. Both died martyrs to the faith under the most cruel circumstances: she murdered by order of her daughter-in-law, and he a victim to the blows of his own brother Boleslas. But it was Ludmilla who trained up Wenceslas, it was she who gave to Bohemia this incomparable prince, and in all his great work of civilisation she has a right to share in his glory. Many storms have swept over Bohemia in the course of its troubled existence, but nothing has been able to uproot the faith planted by Ludmilla in its soil, and St Wenceslas remains to-day a more popular hero than John Huss.

It was through the intervention of Christian Bohemia that a new era dawned for Poland. Dubrava was the Clotilda of her race. Married to the heathen Miecslas, the leader of the great Polish nation, she had the happiness of converting him in 965, and with him his whole people, who

brought their chivalrous courage to the service of the Church. Tradition has preserved nothing of Dubrava save her name, and the memory of this great act; but it is sufficient for her glory, and we can well say of her that her works proclaim her blessed.

There remained in the extreme East of Europe, still sunk in semi-barbarism, yet another Slav people whose religious destiny was to be decided in the course of the ninth century: this was the Russian nation. Their name had re-echoed across the vast expanse of the steppes, and on the borders of the Dnieper they ruled as sovereigns over an immense region stretching from Kiev, their capital, as far as Novgorod, which acknowledged their suzerainty. Their national hero, Igor, so celebrated in all their epic legends, had passed away in the midst of the most fabulous exploits. And it was his widow, Olga, who was the first to receive baptism at Constantinople, the city which had trembled before her husband's advance. She took on this occasion the name of Helen, a name which seemed to foreshadow a new Constantine.

But Olga's son, Sviatoslav, was not destined to fulfil the hopes built upon his mother's name. He remained obstinately attached to pagan rites, in spite of all his mother's entreaties, repulsing her with the words—"What, you expect me to accept a foreign faith? My *droujina* would make fun of me!" It was almost the same reply as Clovis gave to St Remi: "It is not I you must convert, it is the soldiers of my guard." But, unlike the husband of Clotilda, the son of Olga had not the courage to carry his men

with him, and the saintly widow died in 969 without the joy of assisting at the conversion of her people. And yet neither her example nor her apostolate was to remain without fruit. A few years later her grandson Vladimir flung the idol Peroun into the Dnieper, and displayed the Cross of Christ upon his standard. Like Theodosia, Olga had triumphed from her tomb. The Russians have very rightly cultivated a devotion to her august memory. "She was the precursor of Christianity into Russia," writes their chronicler, "as the dawn is the precursor of the sun. As the moon shines in the middle of the night, so she shone in the midst of a pagan people. She was as a pearl on a dung-heap; she purified herself in the sacred waters, and put off the garb of sin of the old Adam and put on that of the new Adam who is Christ. Therefore we say to her, "Rejoice that thou hast made God known unto Russia, for thou hast been the origin of the alliance between Russia and God." ¹

It is not without reason that we have grouped together the foregoing facts. Taken in their entirety they prove to us that Christian Europe owes much more to her queens than to her kings. They also throw a strong light on the part played by St Clotilda. For it is she who heads the procession of crowned evangelists, and everything that was accomplished at a later date by Christian queens, may be traced back in part to her glorious initiative. We

¹ The so-called *Chronicle of Nestor*, translated by L. Liger, p. 54. The question of Olga's Saintship has never been decided. The Bollandists leave the question in suspense: they place her among the *praetermissi* and reserve judgment (July 11th).

realise the wide range that belongs to the biography of the humble wife, who is frequently forgotten and sometimes calumniated, and who led King Clovis to the Baptistery of Reims. The history of a Saint is a page in the history of civilisation. Indeed it is inevitable that it should be so, and only those will express surprise who are unconscious of the hidden virtue that emanates from the Gospel. No doubt the day on which the daughter of the Burgundian kings placed her hand in the hand of Clovis, and swore to be his faithful spouse, Arianism, triumphant throughout Europe, expressed no concern. It had acquired the empire of the world and there were no signs that it was about to lose it. And yet this marriage was the starting-point of a new division of power in the West. The converted spouse of Clotilda was about to convert his people, and his people overturned the throne of Arius, erected that of the Sovereign Pontiff, and created Catholic Europe. Surely the small causes which produce such great results should be full of interest for us all?

CHAPTER II

THE CHILDHOOD OF CLOTILDA

THE kingdom of the Burgundians appears on the threshold of modern times as one of those many ephemeral creations whose ruins were to strew the pages of history before at length a nation rose up capable of resisting the destructive power of centuries. The whole history of the Burgundian people gives evidence of something precarious and incomplete, and the most striking pages in its annals are those that record the catastrophes by which it was rapidly brought to its ruin. And yet its existence was not without advantages for civilisation ; it gave St Clotilda to the world, and this single act would suffice to cast a certain lustre on its memory.

At the time of the birth of the Saint whose life will be recorded in these pages, the Burgundians had already passed through the greater portion of their brief and dramatic career. A generation had passed away since the year 437, when the kingdom which they had founded on the banks of the Rhine had perished beneath the onslaught of the Huns, a kingdom whose memory still lives, preserved in the legends at once so tender and so awe-inspiring of German folk-lore. They now occupied Southern Gaul, of which they had taken possession, partly as

conquerors, partly as fugitives after the misfortunes which had gone far towards putting an end to their national existence. Having first taken refuge in the Savoy Alps, they had made their way down the beautiful valleys of the Saône and the Rhone from Langres as far as Avignon and the Durance. There they had founded a kingdom which, during the closing years of the fifth century, seemed destined to play a great rôle in history. Established between Roman Italy, the last preserver of the imperial traditions, and the conquering kingdom of the Visigoths, from which they were separated by the bed of the Rhone, they had become in a sense the arbiters of the destinies of the Empire. They preferred to number themselves among its defenders rather than its enemies, and on more than one occasion the Burgundians fought on the side of Rome, which rewarded their kings by conferring on them imperial honours, especially the title of Master of the Knights, which Alaric himself had aspired to possess.

It might have been expected that a nation so enamoured of Rome and of civilisation would have been further distinguished by an unswerving fidelity to the Roman faith. Unhappily this was not the case, and the fact gives proof of the incoherency and indecision which were latent in the Burgundian character. Catholics in the first instance, if we accept the testimony of Paulus Orosius, the Burgundians had allowed themselves to be influenced by the active religious propaganda carried on by their neighbours the Visigoths, and had fallen away from their earlier orthodoxy. The royal family

itself was won over to Arianism, if not in its entirety, at least so far as the majority of its members were concerned, and the Burgundian thus presented the spectacle of the only barbarian people not possessed of a national faith.

It was a further cause of weakness in addition to many others. Hemmed in by inconvenient frontiers, having failed either to obtain access to the Mediterranean sea-board, or to win possession of the Alpine passes, identifying themselves with the interests of a moribund society, whilst abandoning their religious conscience to the missionaries of a rival people, and deprived even of the resources which in a low state of civilisation nations are able to draw from fanaticism, the Burgundians were plainly destined to be crushed between the past and the future of Europe.

The division of the kingdom between the several heirs of King Gondové completed the disorganisation of the nation. The four sons of the deceased monarch each claimed a share in his inheritance. One of them, Gondomar, seems to have disappeared without leaving any record of his acts, but we find each of the three remaining brothers established in one of the principal towns of the country, Chilperic at Lyons, Gondebald at Vienne, and Godegisil at Geneva.

Of Chilperic, who was the father of Clotilda, history has little to record. We know that he served the Empire with the same unswerving devotion as did his father and his brother. The Emperor Glycerius, who owed his throne to the support of Burgundian arms, rewarded him in 474 with the

title of Master of the Knights, and, proud of this distinction, he made war against the Visigoths on behalf of the Empire. His religious faith has not been recorded; what we do know is that he married a Catholic wife and that his children were brought up in their mother's religion.

Queen Caretena was a very remarkable woman. Two of her contemporaries, Apollinarus Sidonius and Fortunatus of Poitiers have celebrated her virtues, and, although both were poets addicted to hyperbole and adepts in the art of writing panegyrics, the tribute of praise which they bestowed upon the princess appears to have been merited. Sidonius had no affection for the Burgundians, and did not owe allegiance to Chilperic, and, as regards Fortunatus, his praises were inscribed on her tomb. The perfect accord to be found in their testimony is a guarantee of the sincerity of both. Sidonius, in speaking of Caretena, evokes the memory of Tanaquil and of the first Agrippina,¹ suggestive names, each of which recalls the influence exercised by a noble-hearted woman over her husband. Fortunatus celebrates the princess in terms more worthy of a Christian; she was, he declares, the mother of the poor and the advocate of the guilty before Chilperic. She gave proof on the throne of every virtue, concealing beneath a smiling countenance the fasts and the austerities with which she subdued her flesh.²

Such was the mother of St Clotilda. It was

¹ Apollinarus Sidonius, *Epistolae*, V. 7.

² See Leblant, *Inscriptions Chrétiennes de la Gaule*, Vol. I. p. 70, No. 31.

important to realise her personality in order to understand her daughter who was her living image, and who to the end of her life remained faithful to the maternal precepts and example. Clotilda was born at Lyons, her father's capital, towards the year 474. She had one sister, younger than herself, named Sedeluba, with whom she was educated, both of them bright examples at the court of Lyons of what Christian girls should be. Their mother took the greatest care to remove them from the many pernicious influences which congregate around a court, and to bring them up in the practice of the Christian virtues. At a period when devotion to the Saints was so ardently practised, there can be no doubt that the two sisters were encouraged frequently to invoke the blessed souls under whose patronage Christianity had taken root in Lyons. The local church possessed no more heroic or touching memory than that of the slave martyr, Blandina, whose sublime constancy in the midst of the most cruel tortures had been an honour to her sex and the glory of her companions in slavery. There can be no doubt that the image of the noble virgin was constantly before the eyes of the two young princesses.

The court of Chilperic was the meeting-place of all the important men of the kingdom, and no doubt the Catholic bishops were frequently to be seen there. We know that Apollinarus Sidonius, the cultured prelate, visited the court on more than one occasion, and, indeed, it is to these visits that we owe the few details, unhappily only too rare, which help us to picture the life of those times. Saint

Avitus, the great Saint of Burgundy, must also have been a frequent visitor ; none among his colleagues was more assiduous in attendance on the sovereign, not indeed in the expectation of receiving favours, but in order to defend Catholic interests, and in the hope of bringing back the king to the true faith by the force of personal influence. Thus the princesses must constantly have met these saintly and venerable men in the presence of their parents, surrounded by all the prestige of their ecclesiastical dignity and their commanding talents, and it is pleasant to think of the future wife of King Clovis kneeling for the blessing of the saintly Avitus.

But, among all the bishops, he whom they knew best, and whose virtues and sanctity must have made the deepest impression upon them, was undoubtedly Patiens, bishop of Lyons. Tradition is unanimous in testifying to the heroic charity displayed by the venerable old man during a great famine in Auvergne, and no one enjoyed more completely the respect of his contemporaries.¹ It was a special privilege for Clotilda to be able to study the Catholic Church through such representative ecclesiastics, and we should bear in mind the influence they doubtless exercised over her. Nothing develops the moral life of a child more surely than the impressions of early years, and the virtues with which it is brought in contact leave an ineffaceable imprint on the soul.

The death of Chilperic, which seems to have occurred towards the year 490, produced a great change in the circumstances of the Queen and her

¹ Apollinarus Sidonius, *Epistolae*, VI. 12.

young daughters. In accordance with the universal custom of the times, the kingdom should have been divided between the two brothers of the deceased sovereign, who left no son to succeed him. There is no direct evidence as to how this division was effected, or indeed as to whether it ever took place: all that we know is that from this date onward, Gondebald took up his residence at Lyons. Caretena and her two daughters retired to the court of Godegisil, King of Geneva, who seems to have been the guardian of the young princesses.¹ If we ask why the royal ladies preferred the court of Geneva to that of Lyons, and the protection of Godegisil to that of Gondebald, the answer may probably be found in the fact that Godegisil was a Catholic, whereas Gondebald, as we know, in spite of the hopes which from time to time he excited in the prelates of his kingdom, never succeeded in throwing off the bonds of Arianism.

Freed from the restraints of a throne, Caretena was henceforth able to devote her whole time to her family and her religious duties. It would be unfitting to penetrate into this holy interior, of which, indeed, we could only guess at the main features. The practices of a fervent piety, combined with good works inspired by a wise charity, filled the solitary life of the royal widow, whose home was graced by the presence of two daughters worthy of their saintly

¹ We learn from Gregory of Tours, H. F. II. 28, that the sisters did not live at the court of Gondebald, and it is clear from an incident related by Fredegarius, IV. 22, after the death of Chilperic, that they were living at Geneva. Our conclusion therefore seems justified.

mother. The beautiful lake of Geneva must frequently have been witness of the royal ladies who inhabited its shores, bearing their gifts to the poor, or wending their way to the services of the Church. Popular tradition, which is apt to ignore the humble merit of a Christian life, has in this instance perpetuated the memory of the charity of Clotilda, whom it paints washing the feet of pilgrims.¹ And we know from history that her sister Sedeluba was the foundress of the Church of St Victor on the outskirts of the town.² This work of charity offers indeed to the chroniclers their solitary opportunity for recording the name of the younger princess, for shortly afterwards she retired into the cloister, and in order to efface the memory of her royal origin she adopted the name of Chrona, and was henceforth known to God alone.

Her sister Clotilda was reserved for a higher and more tragic destiny. Towards the period when Sedeluba was bidding a last farewell to the world, there arrived at the court of Geneva a messenger sent by Clovis, King of the Franks, asking the hand of the elder princess in marriage. The name of the young hero had long been familiar to the Burgundians. Accounts had reached them of his exploits in Gaul, of his victory over Syagrius, of the enthusiasm with which he had everywhere been received. The Burgundians themselves had not been unmoved spectators of the triumphant attitude of the young prince whose victories had made him into a neigh-

¹ Fredegarus, III. 18.

² Fredegarus, IV. 22.

bour, and there was perhaps as much anxiety and jealousy as admiration in the sentiments with which he inspired them. As for Clovis himself, careful to conciliate those whom he had no interest in destroying, he kept up friendly relations with the Burgundian kings, and, we are told, sent frequent embassies to the courts of Lyons and Geneva.

Clovis, although still a young man, had long passed the age at which barbarian sovereigns were in the habit of contracting matrimonial alliances. He was already the father of a son named Thierry, the offspring of one of those illicit unions that all Germanic princes permitted themselves, who was being brought up in his father's palace. But Clovis was eager to establish under his roof a spouse whose royal blood should be worthy of his own. If we accept the testimony of the chroniclers, it was the king's envoys, who, filled with admiration for the beauty of Clotilda, extolled her to their master and decided him to ask for her hand in marriage.¹ It is quite probable that such was the case, but we must also take into consideration Clovis' desire to win over the Burgundians as allies against the Visigoths. Moreover, a Catholic princess could not fail to be a bond between him and his subjects of Roman origin, and there is no doubt that this would have been a primary consideration in the eyes of the conqueror.

However this may have been, it is certain that Clotilda's guardian did not hesitate a single instant before accepting a proposal which seemed to promise peace and security to the Burgundian

¹ Gregory of Tours, H. F., II. 28.

nation. Possibly also reasons of a less exalted order contributed towards his glad acceptance of the projected alliance.¹ We shall see at a later date that Godegisil had certain grievances against his brother Gondebald, and that his resentment finally culminated in a declaration of war. If his anger had already been roused at the time we are treating of, he would have been glad to gain in Clovis a future ally against his brother.

As regards Clotilda and her mother, the question naturally presented itself under a totally different aspect. Clotilda at this time was about seventeen years of age, and was in the first flower of her youth and beauty. If, as it is natural to suppose, she felt flattered at being sought in marriage by the most powerful of the barbarian kings of the day, her piety must soon have effaced so worldly a thought. In truth Clovis was a heathen, and how could a fervent Christian throw in her lot with an infidel? The Catholic Church, if she did not formally forbid such alliances, undoubtedly discouraged them in the most emphatic manner. And yet, on the other hand, could a more noble or generous dream suggest itself to the mind of the princess, than that of becoming the providential instrument for the conversion of the Frankish king? What a victory for the Church, and what a source of merit for herself if it was indeed intended that she should be the believing wife by whom the unbelieving husband was to be sanctified?

¹ The reasons for which we decline to follow Gregory of Tours, II. 28, and his satellites, are set out in the Appendix.

In the perplexity of mind in which these difficult considerations must have placed them, we can easily imagine that the two women turned for counsel to those who were the authorised interpreters of the divine law and of the will of the Church. We can imagine the saintly and gentle encouragement of Patiens; we can figure to ourselves the question laid before the great bishop of Vienne, so strong and firm, whose eagle eye would have clearly discerned the vast possibilities that the conversion of Clovis would open up for the Church and for the Frankish people. And if the princesses confided in him their religious anxieties no one was better fitted than he to reassure their tender consciences by showing them, with characteristic audacity of thought, that an alliance with the pagan king would associate Clotilda with some great and mysterious design of Providence. These, in truth, are no more than hypotheses; what however is highly probable is that the bishops were consulted and that they gave their consent on one express condition, a condition recorded by an ancient historian,¹ and which would have been in conformity with the constant tradition of the Church: *i.e.* that the children of the union should be brought up in the Catholic faith. On these terms the Bishops could contemplate without anxiety the union of Clovis and Clotilda, for by a temporary concession they were purchasing the most splendid of expectations, and history teaches us that they were not mistaken.

¹ Dubos, *Critical History of the Foundation of the French Monarchy*, Vol. III. p. 78.

There being no further obstacle to the fulfilment of Clovis' wishes, the marriage was quickly arranged. The betrothal, according to an ancient Burgundian legend,¹ took place by proxy at Châlon-sur-Saône. In accordance with the nuptial rite customary among the Franks, the ambassadors of Clovis presented the sou and the denier representing the purchase of the bride by their master.² Then Clotilda started on her journey to rejoin him whose destiny she had promised to share without having made his acquaintance.

The separation must have been bitter. To drag oneself away from a mother, a sister, a circle of friends, from the pleasant and helpful atmosphere of Catholic charity, to go on a long journey to a country that had barely emerged from barbarism, to live alone and without external sympathy as the wife of a heathen was a prospect which might well discourage any soul less fortified by the spirit of God. What sort of man was Clovis? What fate did he reserve for his wife? Would he keep the promises made in his name? All these questions must have suggested themselves to the mind of the young princess when, after the last farewells with tears in her eyes, she entered the litter which was to bear her by easy stages from her native land. No painter has pictured for us the melancholy scene, but if we wish to realise it in all its pathetic truth, we have only to turn in the poems of Fortunatus³ to the farewell of Galswintha quitting her mother and the beloved

¹ Fredegarus, III. 18.

² Fredegarus, *loc. cit.*

³ Fortunatus, Carmina, VI. 7.

walls of Toledo in order to marry the grandson of Clovis on Frankish soil. We shall find there a note of pathos which even after fourteen centuries cannot fail to touch the heart of the reader.

Thus Clotilda set out for Gaul. The town of Geneva faded from her sight; the maternal horizon disappeared for ever. She was face to face with the unknown and terrifying future that awaited her at the close of her travels. But she was not journeying alone: by her side was the figure of "*Christ who loves the Franks.*"

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE

THE impatient Clovis, eager to embrace his bride, came to meet her, according to a reliable local tradition, at Villery, to the south of Troyes.¹ Thence he escorted her to Soissons, where the marriage ceremony took place, with all customary barbaric pomp. The Franks displayed the greatest enthusiasm over the marriage of their sovereign with the daughter of the Burgundian king. No other royal union of the time made so vivid and lasting an impression. The national bards vied with one another in celebrating the event, and, in their hands, the story took on new and wonderful episodes, until it was transformed into a veritable nuptial poem. It was by this poem alone that the memory of Clotilda's marriage had been preserved, until the day when, for the first time, a chronicler recorded the events of the reign of Clovis. He repeated all the legendary additions, and his successors followed his example. In this way legend at an early date took the place of historical fact, and, during many centuries, all that was best known of the life of Clotilda was that which never really occurred. It is time to restore historic truth to its rightful place, and, without

¹ Fredegarus, III. 19.

entirely ignoring the claims of popular folk-lore, to relegate it to the domain of fiction.¹

Clotilda, as Queen of the Franks, naturally shared in the life and interests of her husband. She lived with him in the ancient Roman city of Soissons, whose sumptuous buildings had served as residences for the Roman governors, and, at a later date, had given shelter to the short-lived regal state kept by Syagrius. Clovis and Clotilda succeeded to the son of Aegidius in the stately magnificence of the alabaster castle situated to the north of the town, whose mighty ruins have in all ages impressed the popular imagination and the mind of the archæologist. The town was rich in Christian sanctuaries; a beautiful basilica dedicated to the Blessed Virgin had been erected on the ruins of a temple of Isis, and the two martyrs, so dear to the piety of the inhabitants of Soissons, Crispin and Crispinian, were honoured in several churches and chapels.

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the days of Queen Clotilda were spent mainly in this single city. The Merovingian kings possessed at that time no proper capital; the centre of their government was wherever they might happen to be, and they were to be found, in turn, in all the quarters of their kingdom. In order to understand this princely existence, we must remember that what to-day we call the civil list, consisted mainly, in those times, of the products in kind of the royal domains. These were both numerous and scattered; their produce was very large, and at a fixed date the king would

¹ See Appendix.

arrive with a numerous retinue to consume the produce on the spot. In this way he would visit in turn his principal palaces, and these constant removals gave to the regal power a certain nomadic character.

Thus Clovis inhabited a large number of different places, more especially during the first years of his reign, before the choice of Paris tended to fix his residence on the banks of the Seine. History is silent as to these earlier years, and we are not in a position to reconstruct for him, as for some of his successors, an account of his various sojourns. We can only assume from what we do know, that several of the royal domains gave shelter in turn to the quiet family life led by St Clotilda.

There is every reason to suppose that the marriage of Clovis and Clotilda proved a happy one. The daughter of Caretena seems to have quickly conquered her husband's heart and she knew the secret of making herself not only loved but respected. Clovis, who previous to his marriage had indulged in various ephemeral unions, seems to have understood from the first what was due to the dignity of the married state. Almost alone among the princes of his race, he allowed his legitimate wife to reign without a rival over his affections. History, at least from the date of his marriage with Clotilda, makes no mention of either a favourite or a natural child in connection with him. While still a heathen he overcame his natural prejudices so far as to allow his two eldest sons to be baptised, and this act of praiseworthy toleration gives evidence of the deference he paid to the wishes of Clotilda. The close union that existed between

the king and queen is shown even more clearly by the eager entreaties that Clotilda was in the habit of addressing to her husband on the subject of his conversion.¹ It is obvious that she must have enjoyed considerable ascendancy over his mind in order to have repeatedly urged so great a sacrifice without fear of a violent refusal. Moreover, we know that when at length the day of grace dawned for Clovis, it was "*the God of Clotilda*" whom he invoked, words full of beauty and pathos which seem to throw an illuminating light on the conjugal life, full of trust and affection, which united the king to his saintly wife.

But we must not allow ourselves to anticipate events. Our historians inform us, and we have no difficulty in believing them, that the conversion of her husband was Clotilda's most constant preoccupation. But the hour of his conversion had not yet sounded. Far from throwing himself into the arms of the Catholic Church, there was a serious danger lest in becoming a Christian he should decide in favour of Arianism. Arianism at this time might almost be described as being the accepted form of Germanic Christianity. Spread among the barbarian tribes with a marvellous missionary zeal by the Goths, who had been among the first adherents of its tenets, it had attracted in turn all the Germanic nations who had consented to adopt Christianity, including the Heruli, the Rugi, the Vandals, the very Burgundians themselves. All the Germanic sovereigns, following the example of Theodoric the Great, professed the creed of Arius. For them and for

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 30.

their people, Arianism was as a distinctive sign which differentiated them from the Catholics of the Roman Empire. It seemed as though, if the Franks were to become Christians, natural pride would necessarily force them to adopt the religion of the conquering nations. It was hardly to be expected that Clovis would consent to be a solitary exception in the circle of sovereigns, and that he would consent to bow the knee before the altars of his vassals.

There was a yet further reason. Clovis' sister Albofléda, on her marriage to Theodoric the Great, had been baptised according to the Arian rite, and it would appear that on the same occasion another sister, Lanthilda, had also embraced this heretical form of Christianity. Arius and his creed, therefore, had already penetrated into the family of the Frankish king; he possessed, so to speak, a foothold in the royal house. Thus all the influences that had weight with the king: national pride, barbarian prejudices, his alliance with the mighty Theodoric, the example of his two sisters, all seemed destined to drive Clovis in the direction of heresy. Clotilda meanwhile kept watch over him.

Providence did not leave the young queen without help. Among the Gaulish bishops whose dioceses had passed by conquest beneath the sceptre of Clovis, the most illustrious and the most influential at that time was undoubtedly St Remi, Bishop of Reims. Metropolitan of the Lower Belgian kingdom, he was the highest ecclesiastical authority among the Franks, and men bowed themselves before his pastoral crook with a veneration of which the king

might well have shown himself jealous, had not the prelate done his utmost from the first to place this devotion at the service of the youthful conqueror. Standing, so to speak, on the extreme verge of civilisation, facing the vast hordes of the barbarian world, Remi had perceived, with that clear-sightedness which is often bestowed on the pastors of souls, the great future that lay before the barbarians who were descending as conquerors upon ancient Gaul. He entertained no illusions concerning the ultimate fate of all attempts at a restoration such as Syagrius was conducting almost under his eyes and in his immediate neighbourhood. Boldly, with a decision and a vigour of action which we cannot sufficiently admire, Remi had taken sides with the invaders.

Scarcely had Clovis entered upon the inheritance of his father Childeric, when he received from the Bishop of Reims a letter of congratulation containing these opening words: "We learn that you have taken into your hands the government of Belgian Gaul."¹ It was a tacit recognition of the legitimacy of the conqueror's rights. After this first step it was easy for the prelate to offer good advice and so propound a scheme of government without offence to the young king. The policy suggested may be summed up in two words: to govern in accord with the bishops.

This act on the part of St Remi had forged the first link between monarch and prelate, and from that time forward their relations had tended

¹ See the restored text of this document in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae*, III. p. 113.

to become more and more intimate. The chroniclers are of opinion that it was Remi who forced the king to give back a precious vessel stolen from his church by the Frankish soldiers during the pillage of the city, and we can well believe that it was he.¹ Having become the subject of Clovis by the conquest of Northern Gaul, the Bishop of Reims was more than ever useful to the king. The new ruler had constant need of the advice of the prelate, of his intimate knowledge of the country, of the authority he enjoyed among the people. Mutual admiration, confidence and friendship drew still closer the ties that united them. The head of a diocese in which several of the royal domains, notably the palace of Attigny, were situated, and brother to Principius, Bishop of Soissons, Remi found himself frequently at court. He became the confidant of Clotilda's pious aspirations, as of her secret anxieties, which he must in a large measure have shared. We can readily imagine that he inspired the conduct of the young queen, down to the smallest details, in the all-important question of her husband's salvation. How could she be better guided than by the counsels of this valiant champion of the Church? It is highly improbable that Remi suggested to her to combat the paganism of Clovis by means of long theological disquisitions such as Gregory of Tours places in her mouth,² and which offer such obvious improbabilities in language

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 27, relates the episode without the name of the Bishop. Fredegarus, III. 16, and the *Liber Historiae* give the name of St Remi. Compare G. Kurth, *Histoire Poétique des Mérovingiens*, pp. 217-220.

² Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II. 29.

and tone. People knew then, as well as they know to-day, that men are not driven to abandon false doctrine by passionate discussions; on the contrary, that minds become more firmly fixed in their errors the more energetically they see themselves combated. In the religious conversations that Clotilda must have held with her husband, there can be no doubt that she spoke rather with love of Jesus Christ, than with disdain of Wodin, that she aimed at touching the heart rather than at convincing the intelligence. It was enough for her to defend her faith when it was attacked, and to do so with the quiet courage and calm reason which at once silence opposition and inspire respect in one's adversaries. For the rest, prayer, good works, the example of Christian virtues were without doubt the chosen weapons which her feminine wit suggested to Clotilda and which the bishop must have sanctioned.

Neither did St Remi himself have frequent recourse to direct exhortation. He preferred to surround the king with influences and examples, and to allow these discreet and silent messengers to take gradual effect. It was impossible that Clovis should not be struck by the virtues and the sanctity of the priests and of the humble monks who helped to clear the forests of his country; impossible that he should not be charmed and subdued by the sublime beauties of the Church liturgy, whenever he had occasion to be present at her services, or that he should not be conscious of the abyss that separated barbarians, however victorious, from men, civilised as they could only be, by Christianity.

Moreover, political considerations began to turn the king's thoughts towards Catholicism. In spite of appearances to the contrary, he felt that there was no place for him in Arianism, that he was fit to play a nobler part than that of following in the wake of his brother-in-law Theodoric, and that by adopting the faith of his Catholic subjects, he was creating for himself an absolutely unique position amongst reigning sovereigns. He foresaw that, placed at the head of a kingdom made strong by unity and confidence, supported with enthusiasm by the orthodox population and by the enormous influence of the Gaulish episcopate, he would dispose of a power undreamt of by the Arian courts. He had only to pronounce himself a Catholic in order to enjoy this vast and fascinating accession of fortune.

Thus the circle of influences was drawing round Clovis which were destined to concentrate on Christianity all the labour of his thought. But dreams and projects passed in bewildering confusion through his brain without producing any result. Every conversion, according to the measure of its sincerity, must be the work of grace. The most powerful considerations cannot bring it about; it springs from the very depths of the human conscience under the pressure of a power more vivid and more irresistible than that of either philosophy or politics. If a clear and accurate vision of the temporal advantages to be gained by adopting the Catholic faith, possessed the force to compel that interior resolution that we call conversion, Theodoric

the Great would most certainly also have embraced Catholicism, for his keen and powerful mind was capable of grasping every truth. But it is grace which, like the stone that was cut out of a mountain, strikes the colossus of error in the feet, and breaks it in pieces, and the hour of grace had not yet dawned for Clovis.

The first year of Clotilda's married life slipped by, darkened by anxiety, and menaced even in its purest joys by sudden dangers. The birth of her first-born son, which should have been to her a cause for rejoicing, became instead the source of much unhappiness. Clovis, as we have seen, had authorised the child's baptism, and the young mother had done all in her power that the sacred ceremony by which her child was to be made a Christian, might produce a salutary effect on the mind of its father. With a pious and touching solicitude, she caused the sanctuary, chosen for the celebration, to be adorned with the greatest care. Draperies of purple and gold were suspended from the vaulted roof, and the walls were hidden beneath the wealth of carpets hung on every side in accordance with Southern custom.¹ Full of joy and of faith in Providence, the Christian queen hoped that God would come to the help of her desire.

God did indeed intervene. He visited the cradle filled with so many holy hopes; He struck down the new-born babe still swathed in its white baptismal robe; He bruised the heart of the mother; He humiliated the faith of the wife and, as though He

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 29.

had been an accomplice in Clovis' incredulity, He furnished him with an unexpected and terrible argument. The barbarian did not hesitate to make use of it. "It is your God," he declared to Clotilda, "who is the cause of our child's death. If it had been consecrated to mine it would have been alive now."

The hour was a bitter one, and the trial seemed almost to transcend the powers of human endurance. But the heroic soul of Clotilda remained untouched by the terrible temptation. The severity of the Almighty, who seemed to have turned His face from her, did not cause her for a single moment to doubt His paternal love. Her heart was untainted by bitterness and in the depths of her sorrow she found words to bless the hand that had struck her. "I give thanks to Almighty God," she declared, "that He has not considered me unworthy to be the mother of a child admitted into the celestial kingdom. Having quitted the world in the white robe of his innocence, he will rejoice in the presence of God through all eternity." ¹

By this generous sacrifice the soul of the Christian queen had not only triumphed over temptation; it had also earned the price of victory. The conversion of Clovis was to be the reward of intrepid faith, and the very blow which seemed to put an end to all Clotilda's hopes, became, on the contrary, without either her knowledge or that of her husband, the point of departure of the conversion she had so ardently prayed for. If the death of Ingomir

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 29.

seemed to plead against the God of the Christians, the sublime strength of soul of the young mother and her supernatural resignation were arguments more weighty even than death.

Once again, however, it seemed as though Clotilda's cause were lost. In the following year the birth of a second son had come to console the hearts of the king and queen. But scarcely had the waters of baptism touched his forehead than he too fell ill. Was the Gospel to be definitely confounded in the sight of the Gentiles? Already Clovis had begun to murmur: "Can we expect any other fate for this child than that of his brother? He was baptised in the name of your Christ, he is certain therefore to die." Clotilda made no answer to these bitter recriminations, but her heart poured itself out before God in humble and passionate prayer. On this occasion the trial was not prolonged, and God hearkened to the prayer of His faithful servant. Clodomir recovered;¹ Clovis was silenced and the Gospel was justified. The inheritance of the Frankish kingdom belonged henceforth to a son of the Church, and the great work of the conversion of the people was in part accomplished.

From the point of view of the world this was all that was needful, for the future of Christianity was assured. But Clotilda had merited a yet further reward; it was her much-loved spouse whom she desired to lead in the way of salvation. Through the intervention of Providence this supreme hope was about to be realised.

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 29.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONVERSION OF CLOVIS

FOUR years had passed since the marriage of Clotilda and Clovis, and the latter was still a heathen. But the year 496 was not destined to pass until, according to the naïve expression of the old Frankish chronicler, necessity had forced the king to confess that which, of his own free will, he had always denied.

Among the many wars which filled his reign the most noteworthy seems to have been that which he waged against the Alamanni. This Germanic people, established on the right bank of the Rhine, between the Maine and the Danube, was a worthy rival to the Frankish nation. They possessed all those great qualities which had won for the latter the sovereignty of Gaul, and they were quite competent to dispute its possession with some hope of success. Moreover, their belligerent character and their need of expansion made it inevitable that they should break out into hostilities against their powerful neighbours.

It would seem to have been the Ripuarian Franks who first withstood the shock of the Alamannic bands. Beneath the walls of Tolbiac, at the entrance to the vast plain which formed the heart

of the Ripuarian kingdom, the Alamanni, who had come down from the heights of the Eifel, came in contact with the army of King Sigebert, who lay in wait to intercept the road to Cologne. The battle was a bloody one, and Sigebert, who apparently remained master of the field, received a wound in his knee which made him lame for the rest of his life.

The danger to a nation who were the allies of the Salii and of a dynasty which was connected by marriage with his own, necessarily obliged Clovis to descend into the arena, apart from the fact that he probably had to defend his own frontiers against the inroads of his turbulent neighbours. In the dearth of all historical information, we can only indulge in conjectures concerning the causes of the war. All that we know for certain is that a great battle which promised to be decisive took place between the armies of the Franks and the Alamanni in the neighbourhood of the Rhine and probably in the direction of Alsace. According to the outcome of the battle, Gaul would have either remained in the possession of the Franks or have fallen as a long-coveted prey into the hands of their redoubtable foes. I may, perhaps, be allowed to transcribe from my *Life of Clovis* the account of this great crisis in Frankish history:—

“Realising all that was at stake, Clovis had assembled his whole army, which was probably augmented by a contingent of Ripuarian Franks. On their side, the Alamanni must have had a no less considerable force drawn up in battle array, for they

were not only able to hold the victory in suspense, but even at a given moment to drive back the Frankish regiments. The Alamannic *furia* was celebrated in battle; their warriors rushed to victory with an impetus that nothing could withstand. Brought face to face with their rivals, whose national pride had been excited by recent events, they knew they were playing for the highest stakes, and their realisation of the gravity of the moment intensified their fever for the fight.

“Already they seemed to be within reach of victory. The Frankish army began to give way and a general rout seemed imminent. Clovis, who was fighting at the head of his troops, saw that the courage of his men was failing and that he could no longer bring them up to the assault. As in a flash of lightning there passed before his eyes all the horrors of defeat—all the disasters of flight. Then, on the point of perishing, abandoned by his Gods, whom he had invoked in vain, he seemed to hear once again, in his inner conscience, that much-loved voice that had spoken to him so often of a greater and more powerful God. And at the same moment, from the depths of his memory, stored with the words of Clotilda, there arose the figure of the loving and tender Christ, who was, as she had assured him, the vanquisher of death and the Prince of centuries to come. And in his despair he turned to Him with a cry of anguish and distress: ‘Jesus Christ,’ he exclaimed, according to the evidence of our ancient historian, ‘Thou who art, according to Clotilda, the Son of the living God, help

me in my distress, and if Thou givest me victory, I will believe in Thee and will be baptised in Thy Name.'

"The words of Clovis have re-echoed through centuries and will be recorded by history through all time. Uttered in the midst of the horrors of the battle-field, from the depths of a royal heart speaking in the name of his people, they are something more than the words spoken by a man in a moment of peril; they represent the nation itself in the most solemn moment of its existence. Such is the historic import of the vow that fell from the lips of Clovis in that supreme moment: it was a pact proposed to Christ by the Frankish people, and which Christ ratified. For, writes the chronicler, scarcely had Clovis pronounced these words, when the fortunes of the field seemed suddenly to be reversed. As though they were conscious of the intervention of some new and powerful ally, the soldiers of Clovis recovered themselves; the Frankish troops returned to the charge, the Alamanni fell back in their turn, their king was killed in the *mêlée*, and the vanquishers saw themselves transformed into vanquished. The death of their leader gave a final blow to their valour; they flung away their arms, and on the very field of battle begged for mercy of the Frankish king. Clovis treated them with kindness and generosity, and, satisfied with the fact of their submission, he put an immediate end to the war."

Such, described from a contemporary source, is the history of the triumph of Clovis over the Alamanni,

or rather, we may say, the triumph of Christianity over paganism. We find a worthy counterpart to this great battle in that of the Pons Milvius: the one closed the annals of the ancient world, the other opens the annals of the modern world. Its importance in history is therefore absolutely unique. Looking back from the point of vantage that fourteen centuries of time afford to the historian, we can perceive that the destinies of Europe were decided at the same time as those of the Frankish people, that the future of the Frankish people is to be traced to the victory of their king, and that all these mighty interests were dependent on the solution given, in the depths of a man's conscience, to the essential problem which presents itself to the soul of each one of us. It is here that lies the true interest of the event. The sudden action of a soul, which, arriving at a decision as in a flash of lightning, turned towards the Saviour of the world, displaced in a single instant the centre of gravity of history, gave birth to the first Catholic nations, and placed in their hands the helm of civilisation.¹

Nor must we forget that the triumph of Clovis was also the triumph of Clotilda. Her prayers and tears had at length prevailed, and the husband to whom she was deeply attached would never be taken from her, either in this world or the next. We will not attempt to describe her joy when she clasped the victor in her arms and learned the truth from his own lips. Moments of such pure and intense happiness are rare in any human life. For Clotilda

¹ G. Kurth, *Clovis*, p. 315-318.

it was the supreme moment of her existence, and its sweetness sufficed to radiate all her remaining years. Later, sorrow engulfed her saintly soul and turned her days to a veritable martyrdom, but one joy could never be taken from her : that of having given to God the soul most dear to her on earth, and of having been chosen to unfold the Gospel to the greatest of Christian nations.

Clotilda was anxious that not a minute should be lost before securing the fruits of Clovis' vow. Without delay she sent a message to St Remi, inviting him to Attigny, where, as seems probable, she was living for the time with her husband.¹ Secrecy was at first observed as regards the change that had come over the heart of the king, and meanwhile the work of his instruction was hurried forward. As a friend of the bishops, the husband of Clotilda, and the leader of a people a great number of whom were Catholics, Clovis was very far from being one of those untutored savages into whose heart no ray of Christianity had penetrated. Nevertheless it is clear that the services of St Remi as a catechist were indispensable ; he possessed a thorough knowledge of the barbarian world, he foresaw their brilliant future and, above all, he could claim the confidence of the king.

Before very long preparations were begun for the baptism of Clovis. But a question presented itself which was to be for some time a source of serious

¹ We have adopted here the ingenious conjecture of the Rev. F. Jubaru in the *Études Religieuses*, vol. LXVII. p. 297-300 (Feb. 15th, 1896).

anxiety, both to the bishop and to the royal family.

It was not, as has been pointed out, among the Frankish people that any resistance to the king's conversion was likely to arise. The barbarian Franks, scattered in times of peace among their Flemish and Brabantine farms, were in a state of complete ignorance as to what happened at court. Accustomed through long centuries to serve with fidelity the Christian Empire, whatever the religion of the chief who represented it might happen to be, they continued to live in all their heathen grossness without troubling themselves concerning the faith of other people. If their apathetic indifference left them in ignorance of Christian doctrines, at least they entertained towards them no feelings of disdain or of systematic hatred. They probably would have risen in revolt had the attempt been made to force Christianity upon them, but the conversion of their king failed to excite in them the smallest indignation. The sovereign did as he pleased, and they were his faithful warriors: such, in plain English, was the point of view of the vast majority of the Franks, and Clovis had no need to trouble himself about them.

It was quite another matter with the faithful bodyguard, which, bound to the king by a pledge of honour, was associated in all his acts and shared in his good and evil fortunes. The antrustions—for such was the name borne among the Franks by these chosen warriors—were closely linked to his daily life; they shared in all his personal interests, in his friendships and enmities, and his Gods were

their Gods. What would become of this intimate communion of views and sentiments when Clovis passed from the service of Wodin to the service of Christ? It was absolutely essential that his antrustions should follow him to the foot of the new altars; otherwise the guard would disband itself, and the king, deprived of his glorious band of followers, would be stripped of all prestige.

But what guarantee had he that his faithful body-guard would sacrifice their gods to their king? Clovis was far from being entirely at ease on this point. "I am ready to listen to you," he assured St Remi, "but my followers will not forsake their gods." These words, which the chronicler attributes to him, sum up with great precision the problem which the powerful monarch had to face. As there was no possibility of taking any definite steps until he had arrived at some understanding with the antrustions, Clovis summoned them to a meeting, explained his intentions and asked their advice. As with one voice, they all declared that they were ready to forsake their mortal gods, and to accept the eternal God announced to them by Clovis. Thus, by a readiness which the Frankish chronicler accepts as providential, they disposed of the one serious obstacle that existed to the conversion of Clovis. There only remained to fix the date of the event.

"An ancient tradition which was said to have come down from apostolic times, ordained that the sacrament of baptism should only be administered on Easter Sunday in order that this great festival

might be, in a sense, a day of resurrection both for God and for men. But, in the opinion of the bishops, a respect for tradition should not be allowed to override the very important reasons that existed for not prolonging the catechumenate of the king and his followers. Taking into consideration the unique circumstances of the case, it was deemed advisable to make an exception to the ordinary rule, and to fix the ceremony for Christmas Day. After the Easter festival the Nativity was undoubtedly the feast which by its mystical significance, and by the imposing solemnity of its rites, best lent itself to the great event that was about to take place.

“Clovis arranged with the bishops that the feast should be celebrated with all possible magnificence. All the most important personages of his realm were invited to be present, and invitations were issued moreover to princes of the Church beyond the frontiers of the kingdom. We know at least by a letter from St Avitus of Vienne that the illustrious prelate was among those bidden to be present. The baptism of Clovis took on itself the importance of an international event. Christian Gaul followed the preparations with a sympathetic interest; the princes of the Catholic hierarchy turned their eyes full of hope towards the Frankish nation, and a tremor of joy passed through the Church which in so many lands was languishing under the yoke of heresy.

“The great day dawned at last which was to convert the Frankish nation into the eldest daughter

of the Catholic Church. It was the 25th of December 496. Never since its first foundation had the city of Reims been witness of so imposing a solemnity; nor had it been behindhand in displaying all the pomp necessary for its worthy celebration. Rich carpets adorned the fronts of the houses; great embroidered veils, stretched across the streets, cast solemn shadows; the churches were radiant in all their finery, the baptistery was adorned with almost inconceivable grandeur, and countless candles shone through the clouds of ascending incense. There was something celestial in the sweet odour, writes the old chronicler, and those who, by the grace of God, were witnesses of the ceremony, might have imagined themselves transplanted into the midst of the joys of Paradise.

“From the ancient palace of the Governors of Lower Belgium, where he had taken up his residence, the Frankish king, followed by a triumphal procession, made his way amid the enthusiastic acclamations of the crowd to the Cathedral of Notre Dame, where the baptism was to take place. ‘He advanced,’ writes a contemporary author, ‘like a second Constantine to the baptismal font to be cleansed from the leprosy of sin, and the stains of former guilt were about to be washed away in the laver of regeneration.’ The procession was formed in accordance with the ecclesiastical ritual. At its head was carried a cross, followed by the sacred books borne by clerics; then came the king led by the bishop, as though to guide him into the House of God. Behind them walked Clotilda, the

true heroine of the day, and she was accompanied by the youthful Theodoric, who was to follow his father to the font, and by the Princesses Lanthilda and Albofleda, the former an Arian, and the latter still plunged in the darkness of heathenism. Three thousand Franks, among whom were all the king's bodyguard, followed their sovereign, and came, like him, to acknowledge the God of Clotilda as the supreme power. The Litany of the Saints alternated with the Church's most triumphant hymns, and re-echoed through the festive town, like chants in the celestial kingdom. 'Is this,' asked Clovis of St Remi, 'the kingdom of heaven that you promised me?' 'No,' answered the prelate, 'but it is the beginning of the road that leads thither.' Arrived at the threshold of the baptistery, where the bishops who were to take part in the ceremony came to meet the procession, it was the king who spoke first and requested St Remi to confer upon him the Sacrament of Baptism. 'It is well, great Sicamber,' answered the priest; 'bow down thy neck with meekness, adore what thou hast hitherto burned and burn what thou hast adored.' And forthwith the sacred ceremony commenced, with all the solemnity that has been observed through long centuries. Replying to the liturgical questions of the officiating priest, the king declared that he renounced the worship of Satan, and repeated his profession of the Catholic faith in which, in accordance with the special needs of a time in which Arianism was rampant, the belief in the Most Holy Trinity was formulated with extreme precision.

Then, stepping down into the baptismal waters, he received the triple sacramental immersion in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. On leaving the baptistery he received further the Sacrament of Confirmation, in accordance with the custom observed at adult baptisms.¹ The members of the royal family were immersed after the king. Lanthilda, who was already a Christian, was not re-baptised, but merely received confirmation according to the Catholic rite. As regards the three thousand Franks who crowded round the sacred edifice, it is probable that they were baptised by aspersion, which was already practised at that date. All the newly baptised were subsequently clothed in white garments, typical of the state of grace into which they had entered in virtue of the Sacrament of Regeneration.”²

One circumstance will have impressed the reader in this description, the main points of which have been taken from the most ancient sources : we refer to the presence of Clotilda in the baptismal procession. It was her work which received its final crown on this day of festivity. Who, better than she, deserved to rejoice and to be a happy witness of the event? Like that other valiant Christian, Joan of Arc, who, a thousand years later, was to lead the triumphal procession of another king to that same Church, she had borne the heat of the day and it was only just that she should have her share of honour.

¹ See Appendix.

² G. Kurth, *Clovis*, p. 339-348.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE

THE mission entrusted to Clotilda by Providence was accomplished; the Frankish king was a Catholic and the French nation was founded. The humble Christian who had been chosen as the instrument of this work of salvation was about to retire into the seclusion of her home and disappear behind the great destinies that she had inaugurated. History has nothing further to record of her during the reign of Clovis; the only occasion on which mention is made of her name is in conjunction with that of her husband and in reference to preparations which they made together concerning their tomb.

But if the daily life of the Saint was henceforth screened from the light of publicity, it can only have been yet more meritorious in the sight of God. Family duties, the constant exercise of charity, the discreet but beneficent influence that she brought to bear on her husband, formed her daily preoccupations. Her name does not appear in connection with any of the deeds of Clovis, but none the less her sanctity penetrated them all, and we can rest assured that whenever he laboured on behalf of the kingdom of God he found in her a zealous and active co-worker.

In spite of the silence of contemporary chronicles, we

shall make an attempt to reconstruct, in some measure, the royal and saintly existence which we have undertaken to relate. In default of special information we can trace the main lines of her life in that of Clovis, which is more fully known to us, and of which Clotilda, as a faithful wife, shared the various vicissitudes.

The Frankish monarchy had advanced with great strides during the ten years of Clovis' reign. From Soissons it had penetrated to Paris. Already at that time the ancient town, overflowing the narrow limits of the Island of the City, which had been its cradle, had spread itself out along both banks of the noble river, but more especially on the left bank, where, all through the Merovingian period, the political life of the Frankish kingdom was centred. The vast palace of the *Thermae*, the imposing ruins of which still arrest the eye in the midst of the gay life of the Latin quarter, was, in all probability, the home of the royal couple during their sojourns in the capital. During the summer months they preferred to live in one or other of the royal villas, those nearest to Paris being situated at Epineuil, Bonneuil, Reuil, Chelles and Clichy. In each of these royal residences the Saint, who had her own quarters, led the stately life of a powerful queen, surrounded by a numerous following of officials and servants. Her court, like that of her mother Caretena, in earlier years at Lyons, was the *rendezvous* of all who had a favour to beg. There can be no question that the bishops and other ecclesiastical dignitaries of the Gallic Church were constantly in attendance, and that the founders of

religious houses frequently returned from their visits to the court enriched by the liberality of the pious queen. Clotilda loved to surround herself with saintly souls whose piety was an encouragement to her own, and there can be little doubt that in the midst of this barbarian society she attracted to herself all who were distinguished by the lustre of their virtues and the dignity of their life.

It is therefore highly probable that at an early date, as we learn from pious traditions, friendly relations were established between the queen and the saintly woman who was regarded as the good genius of the capital. The Virgin of Nanterre, who had at this time already entered on the last years of her earthly career, enjoyed an immense popularity with the people of Paris, who have always venerated the figure of the nun, whether, as then, under the name of Geneviève, or, as in our day, under that of Sister Rosalie.¹ The people paid a willing homage to the brilliancy of her virtues, to the virile strength of a soul that nothing could daunt, and, above all, to the ardour of her patriotism. It seems at first sight a little strange to speak of patriotism in a nun of the sixth century, and it is possible that the true meaning may not be understood in an age in which patriotism has come to be identified more and more with hatred of foreigners. But St Geneviève was patriotic as Joan of Arc was patriotic, in the sense that her patriotism consisted above all in a ruling love for the people in the midst of whom she had been born. And this love became in her the

¹ See Appendix.

principle of a ceaseless and dauntless activity, triumphing over all the weaknesses of her sex. What Joan of Arc was in the presence of the English, that Geneviève had been before the barbarian invaders. She alone had persuaded her fellow-citizens not to despair at the approach of Attila and his Huns. If she did not lead the assault like the Maid at Orleans she at least stood in the breach when Paris was besieged by the conquering Franks, and she only escaped in order to pass through a thousand dangers and seek from afar the means of revictualling the city. The Franks bore no grudge against their courageous adversary; once masters of Paris they too had bowed down like the native population, before the ascendancy of this valiant daughter of France who appeared before them as the advocate of the oppressed. Geneviève, in a word, was the most popular figure in all Paris. Men were accustomed to meet with her wherever there was suffering to soothe, grief to console, injustice to redress, a kindly word to be spoken, a bold initiative to take. The soul of Paris seemed to find utterance by the lips of the holy nun, who spoke with an animation and a kindliness which were emphatically French.¹

¹ See the Life of the Saint by the Bollandists, under the date of Jan. 3rd, and the new editions given by M. Kohler in the *Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études*, pamphlet 48, and by the Abbé Narbey in the *Bulletin d'Histoire et d'Archéologie du Diocèse de Paris*, 1884. M. Krusch, who has attempted to prove this important document to be apocryphal, has been triumphantly refuted by the Abbé Duchesne (*Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, vol. LIV.).

It is not surprising that so unique a woman should have quickly made friends with Clotilda. Geneviève did not hesitate to ask an interview of royal personages, whenever the interests of charity demanded it. On her side Clotilda was doubtless attracted by the penetrating charm of the Christian sybil. A warm and sincere friendship may well have sprung up between the daughter of the people and the daughter of kings. History, it is true, makes no mention of the fact, but all the circumstances of the case seem to point in that direction. Otherwise how can we explain the unprecedented honour that later was paid to Geneviève when at her death the royal vaults of Mount Lutetia were thrown open to receive her mortal remains? By thus sharing her last dwelling-place with the humble nun, Clotilda would seem to have wished to give an incontrovertible proof of the link that bound them together, and it is quite in accordance with historic truth that we should interpret the act as one of the highest significance.

The principal occupation of the queen during these years was, we need hardly say, the education of her children, who were four in number. After Clodomir, who was born about the year 494, there followed two sons, Childebert and Clothair, and one daughter, who received her mother's name in baptism. All the children grew up under the personal surveillance of their mother, during the frequent absences of Clovis on his various campaigns.

Thus Clotilda took no part in her husband's military exploits. There came a day, however, when

she was forced to follow them with the keenest personal interest. An envoy, sent from Geneva by Godegisil, invited Clovis to enter into an offensive alliance with him against Gondebald, making him at the same time the most brilliant promises in case of success.¹ The two uncles of the queen were about to embark on a fratricidal war, and her husband was called upon to take sides. It was indeed an unhappy position for a Christian wife.

The causes of the rivalry that burst out in the royal Burgundian family are not known to us. Until then, as we have seen, concord had reigned between the brothers. As far as we are able to ascertain, they had lived in peace with one another, and the most distinguished man in Burgundy, St Avitus, has testified to the fraternal tears shed by Gondebald at the death of Chilperic.² But the disappearance of the latter seems to have been the principal cause of the conflict between the two survivors. Gondebald enjoyed many advantages over his brother. He was in the position of the real king of Burgundy, while Godegisil appeared to be merely one of his lieutenants. He was recognised

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 32.

² St Avitus, *Epistolae ad Gundobadum* (in the edition of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*). For a long time this passage puzzled historians, who, convinced of the pretended act of fratricide committed by Gondebald, regarded it either as an expression of scathing irony or as a proof of revolting adulation. Since it has been clearly demonstrated that Gondebald did not commit the crimes of which popular legends have accused him, the words of the Saint may be taken in their natural sense, and may be regarded as a further argument in favour of the innocence of the Burgundian king.

by foreign powers, who preferred to address themselves to him when they wished to treat with the Burgundians. This superiority, whether it was due to his talents and character, or merely to the force of circumstances, was of a nature to excite the ill-will of his younger brother. There may have been yet more definite grounds of complaint, and we are entitled to believe with other historians that the origin of Godegisil's jealousy lay in the fact that Gondebald had taken possession of the lion's share of Chilperic's territory. Determined to put an end to an equivocal situation, and too weak to be able to depend on his own forces, Godegisil resolved to appeal for help to the husband of his adopted daughter.

There were many reasons which induced the Frankish king to respond to this appeal. Putting aside the fiery ambition which did not easily allow him to refrain from taking part in so important a quarrel on his own frontiers, he could not hesitate between the two belligerents. Godegisil had been Clotilda's guardian, had acted a father's part towards her, and it is more than probable that he was an adherent of the Catholic faith.¹ Moreover, he was very far from exciting the same feelings of enmity in the Franks as they entertained towards Gondebald, precisely because he was less powerful and less gifted with political talents. It is only natural that in a question in which her personal feelings

¹ We know at least that in conjunction with his wife Theodelinda, he built the monastery of St Peter at Lyons.—Pardessus, *Diplomata*, vol. I. p. 156.

were so intimately concerned, the wishes of Clotilda should have weighed with her husband. And placed as she was, in the necessity of taking sides with one or the other, she naturally intervened in an energetic manner in favour of the uncle to whom she was largely indebted. But, at the same time, while coming to the help of the one, she had no wish to make relentless war on the other. It was a question of saving Godegisil not of exterminating Gondebald, and we have the right to assume that this was Clotilda's programme, for in the event we shall see it carried out in every particular by Clovis.

The king of the Franks invaded Burgundy; he helped Godegisil to humiliate Gondebald; under the walls of Dijon he inflicted a sanguinary defeat on the latter, forcing him to fly to the most distant part of his kingdom and to take refuge at Avignon.¹ Clovis had no wish to crush him utterly. Instead, therefore, of pursuing him to his last stronghold, he retraced his steps, satisfied with having saved his wife's adopted father, with whom he left an army corps consisting of five or six thousand men.² Such moderation in warfare does not seem to have been habitual with the intrepid conqueror. His people, surprised to see him return for the first time from a victorious campaign with empty hands, could not understand what had occurred; they imagined that their hero, in an excess of generous loyalty, had allowed himself to be tricked by the Burgundians, and they elaborated

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 32.

² Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 33.

one of those fables which, after the lapse of fourteen centuries, it is time to banish from the domain of history.

We shall give the Frankish legend in all its naïve improbability. The reader can then see for himself that even if one were to accept the popular explanation, the policy of Clovis would still give proof of the humanity and moderation which may be ascribed to the influence of Clotilda. According to Gregory of Tours, Godegisil had installed himself in triumph at Vienne, his brother's capital. Meanwhile Clovis, who had increased his army, started in pursuit of Gondebald with the intention of wresting Avignon from him and putting him to death. The defeated king trembled for his safety behind the walls of his stronghold. In his extremity he turned to his counsellor Aredius, who is described by the legend as having already come to the assistance of the king on a previous occasion, to repair a desperate situation by his astuteness. "We have only one resource left," said the ingenious counsellor; "we must soften the savage humour of the Frank. Leave it to me; I shall pass myself off as a deserter, and I shall soon be able to talk him over. Only promise me to carry out my instructions." Gondebald gave the required promise, and Aredius, making his way to the enemy's camp, presented himself before Clovis. "I have abandoned that wretched Gondebald," he declared; "and if you will deign to take me into your service you and yours will find me a faithful servant."

Clovis hastened to make him welcome, and before

long the Burgundian had gained his confidence, for he was a man of agreeable conversation and of apparent sagacity, and he displayed great fidelity in carrying out the various missions that were entrusted to him. Nevertheless Clovis laid siege to the town of Avignon. "If you will listen to good advice, though you are not in need of it," said the wily Burgundian to the king, "I will tell you what I think with perfect frankness. Why do you stay here wasting the strength of your army, while your enemy occupies an impregnable position? You devastate the fields and you ravage the whole country, but you cannot touch Gondebald. It would be far better to send an embassy to him and impose an annual tribute; by these means you will spare the country and you will turn your enemy into a vassal. If he refuses your offer you will of course be free to act as you please." Clovis adopted the suggestion; he withdrew his army on to Frankish territory and obtained from Gondebald the promise of an annual tribute, of which the Burgundian king paid the first instalment.

Thus we see that popular opinion, mystified by the pacific conclusion of the Burgundian campaign, was only able to account for the situation by imagining the presence of some influential counsellor who would have urged on Clovis a policy of justice and moderation. They seek to discern this faithful and powerful adviser in the person of the fabulous and perfidious Aredius, and it did not occur to them that the Frankish king was already provided with a far more trustworthy and devoted counsellor in the person of his Christian wife, whose first aim was to put an end

to the deplorable conflict which rent her family in two. Such, however, was the savage temper of the public mind in the sixth century. Men could only understand cunning and violence, and they utterly ignored the gentler virtues.

It seemed as though Clotilda would be able to congratulate herself on the comparatively satisfactory outcome of a war that had caused her such keen anxiety. But her satisfaction was destined to be of short duration. It was fated that a fratricide should put an end to the unhappy quarrel in which the hands of the Frankish king had remained unstained by the blood of his relations. Hardly had Clovis turned his back when Gondebald issued forth from Avignon, and laid siege to Vienne, his capital, where Godegisil, in the pride of his triumph, had hastened to establish himself. Threatened by famine the latter ordered all useless persons to leave the town. This measure worked his ruin, for a well-borer who was in the number of those expelled, offered to lead the besiegers to the heart of the city by means of the water conduit. Finding the enemy masters of the town, Godegisil took refuge in the Arian church,¹ hoping that the soldiers would at least respect their own sanctuaries. The hope was a vain one, and Godegisil perished at the foot of the altar together with the

¹ Certain historians have sought to prove from this fact that Godegisil was an Arian. It might equally well be argued that Amalaric, King of the Visigoths, was a Catholic in spite of all the evidence of history, for when he was attacked in Barcelona by the Frankish army he took refuge in the Catholic church. Is it not obvious that in both cases the fugitive took refuge in the spot most sacred to his enemy?

Arian bishop who had declared in his favour. Streams of Burgundian and Roman blood flowed on that fatal day, and even after the first fever of carnage was passed there followed a series of tortures and executions in which all the great families of the kingdom were sufferers, before the fierce vengeance of Gondebald was satisfied.¹

The tragic death of Godegisil must have been a bitter grief to his adopted daughter, who had done all in her power to avert such a calamity. Moreover, it was a great blow to Clovis, who thus saw his ally perish by the sword of their common enemy with the loss of all that had been gained by the intervention of his arms. Nevertheless, we do not find that either resentment or a desire for vengeance caused him to hesitate for a moment in the policy of strict moderation that he had marked out for himself towards his victorious foe. The King of Burgundy was the only neighbour whose frontiers he respected, and shortly after these tragic events he effected a sincere reconciliation with him. On the borders of their respective kingdoms the two sovereigns met, each on his own barge on the river Cure, a tributary of the Yonne, and their interview resulted in a permanent peace.² Henceforward their respective grievances were considered buried. Clovis found in Gondebald not only a faithful ally, but we may almost say a vassal. And during his lifetime Burgundy followed in the wake of Frankish policy.

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 33.

² *Vita Sancti Eptadii* in Dom Bouquet's *Recueil des historiens de Gaule et de France*, Vol. III. p. 380.

The results of Clovis' attitude were in every way satisfactory and were obtained without shedding a drop of blood. It was not the policy of a cruel and cunning savage such as false tradition has represented Clovis to have been, nor was it in any way unworthy of a Christian sovereign. We are justified in attributing it in part to the gentle influence of Clotilda, intervening between her relations in order to soften the bitterness of their quarrels, and finally joining their hands in the bond of friendship. If we remember that instead of acknowledging this beneficent intervention, popular legend, inspired by the barbarism of the times, has represented Clotilda as the evil genius who urged on her relations in a war of extermination, we can understand the magnitude of the injustice of which history has been guilty towards the saintly queen.

Yet another grief was in store for Clotilda. In the year 506 her mother Caretena died at Lyons not long after attaining her fiftieth year. Her life had been spent in good works, and had furnished an example for that of her daughter. We are not told whether Clotilda was able to attend her death-bed, but even if this last comfort was denied to the dying woman, she at least carried with her to heaven the precious consolation of knowing that her grandchildren were being brought up in the Catholic faith. The author of her epitaph has stated in explicit terms that this knowledge shed the greatest happiness over the last years of her life.¹

Her daughter did not fail to carry on the maternal

¹ See Appendix.

traditions. Of her also, Apollinarus Sidonius might have declared that she was the Tanaquil of a new Lucumo, the Agrippina of a new Germanicus. Yet these rhetorical comparisons express very imperfectly the rôle of the Christian wife. After what we have said, no one can doubt but that Clotilda's influence over her husband was largely increased by his conversion. She made use of it in the interests of religion and charity, and we can well believe that of the many pious foundations attributed to Clovis by history, the larger number, if not all, were due to the initiative of his wife. Of a certain abbey founded by him, that of St Martin d'Auch, local tradition states explicitly that it was erected by him at the request of Clotilda. And by a coincidence that can hardly be deemed fortuitous, the Church of St Mary, which was the cathedral of the same town, celebrated each year the double office of St Clotilda, on May 3rd.¹ If the religious foundations which date from this remote period had preserved their authentic records with greater care, we might frequently have seen side by side with the figure of the king, their founder, that of the gentle smiling queen inspiring his generosity. But the archives of the sixth century have perished beyond recall, and the shadows of oblivion have spread over all the works of that period. By a fortunate exception, the church founded in Paris by Clovis and Clotilda has alone preserved some record of its early history. The following, according to an ancient chronicler, is the origin of the building which the king and

¹ G. Kurth, *Clovis*, p. 524 with note 2.

queen intended for their last resting - place on earth.

The hill which to-day is crowned by the majestic dome of the Pantheon, was, in the sixth century, an uninhabited solitude. It was called Mount Lutetia, and it closed the horizon of the Paris of the Merovingians which spread out on either side of the Seine valley in the midst of which lay the sacred island which was the cradle of the city. The road from Paris to Sens led up Mount Lutetia between vineyards and gardens, and crossed a large plateau on which was situated the most ancient cemetery of Paris. This cemetery, which dated from the Roman occupation, contained not only the latest pagan tombs but also the earliest Christian tombs of the town, among others, those of the Bishop St Prudentius and several of his successors.

“ More than once from their Roman palace, which faced the hill-side, the eyes of Clovis and Clotilda had rested on the tranquil horizon from the heights of which the solemn messenger of death seemed to come down to them mingled with the murmur of the shady slopes. The idea suggested itself to them of preparing their last resting-place on the heights, within the shadow of a sanctuary which would be a lasting monument to their common faith, and which would display over the whole valley the glorious emblem of the resurrection. In the history of this sacred edifice the memory of Clotilda has ever been closely linked to that of Clovis. There can be no doubt that it was she who first suggested the idea to the king in one of those intimate conversa-

tions inspired by the unity of their faith. A Parisian chronicler of the seventh century, whose local recollections are frequently of great historical value, explicitly attributes the initiative to Clotilda, though he adds that the royal couple had planned the church as a votive offering to be built if the king returned victorious from his campaign in Aquitaine. What is quite certain is that the building was only begun in the last years of Clovis' reign.

"The king wished to inaugurate the undertaking with all the solemnity of the Germanic rite, which, with its curious barbaric customs, was quite unknown to the Roman population of Paris. Consequently the memory of it has been preserved as of some rare event, and the chronicler has felt called upon to transmit to posterity a description of the strange ceremonies. Standing fully armed on the plot of ground that he intended to consecrate to the new church, Clovis, with all his might, flung into the air his Frankish battle axe which had split the skulls of so many of his enemies. By this symbolical act he intended to show that he took possession of the ground after the manner of victorious warriors, or perhaps after that of Thor himself, who, when he flung his awful thunderbolts to earth, took possession for all eternity of all the soil on which they fell.

"Before long the church rose from the ground, resting upon a crypt which was destined to receive the royal tombs, and possessing all the characteristics of the early basilicas. A historian tells us that it was 200 feet long, and from 50 to 60 feet in width. The interior was not vaulted and the walls

were adorned after the ancient fashion with rich mosaics and mural paintings. The main entrance was by a triple portico on the east façade ornamented similarly to the interior with mosaics and paintings representing scenes from the Old and the New Testament. Close beside the church were spacious conventual buildings for the use of the Canons regular who were to serve the choir. A vast extent of territory adjoining the palace gardens, and stretching from the Seine on the one side to the Bièvre on the other, formed a wider enclosure for this truly royal foundation. The greater part of the land was devoted to gardens and vineyards, through which meandered pleasant paths beneath the shade of hazel and almond trees, which were sung in charming verse by the poet, Jean de Hautefeuille, in the twelfth century. The domain assigned to the monastery was of great extent and included Nanterre, Rosny, Vannes, Fossigny, and Choisy. Clotilda appears to have handed over a part of her own dowry, for one of the original properties owned by the Abbey bore the name of 'the fief of St Clotilda.'"¹ Moreover it was to her that the duty fell of completing the structure; she supplied the means for putting on the roof and for finishing the various outbuildings, and she presided at the ceremony of consecration.

Clovis himself was carried off by death before the edifice could be completed. Before his last resting-place was ready to receive him, before the days of his full maturity were passed, the mighty conqueror

¹ G. Kurth, *Clovis*, p. 549-551.

vanished from the world which he had filled with the clamour of his arms. He died at the age of forty-five and was buried in a great stone sarcophagus ornamented only with crosses, and there he rested for many centuries, as the Scandinavian kings used to rest beneath their lofty hills crowned with mighty ash trees.

Thus Clotilda became a widow before she had attained her fortieth year. Her union with Clovis had lasted nineteen or twenty years and had been crowned with happiness. The man whose salvation she had laboured for was doubly dear to her and she mourned him all her life. With him there vanished her last years of peace and happiness. The remainder of her earthly career was spent in solitude and it was by a path strewn with crosses that she attained at last to eternal peace.

CHAPTER VI

YEARS OF WIDOWHOOD

THE death of Clovis did not deprive Clotilda of her regal state; she continued to enjoy the rank and wealth of a queen. Frankish custom demanded that on the morrow of a wedding the husband should bestow a dowry on his wife, which was known in the German tongue as the "morning gift." We know from various examples that the "morning gift" of a queen often included whole towns,¹ and represented a sufficient income to support a royal widow in a manner befitting her rank after the death of her husband. On this principle Clotilda's dowry was composed of a certain number of towns and of *villas* in different parts of the kingdom; it is more than probable that it included the town of Tours, which subsequently became her favourite residence. Thus she was able to continue to lead a royal existence without retrenching her accustomed liberality.

Clotilda enjoyed however no further share in the affairs of the kingdom. The very education of her children was taken out of her hands by the death

¹ Thus Galswintha received in dowry from Chilperic the towns of Bordeaux, Limoges, Cahors, Béarn and Cieutat. Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, IX. 20.

of their father. Two most pernicious customs were in vogue among the Galic Franks. One, which they had adopted in common with all the other Germanic nations, ordained that all the sons of a king should share equally in the political heritage of their father, and that the kingdom should be divided into as many portions as there were male heirs. According to the other, which was even more barbarous, all boys, whether princes or simple warriors, obtained their majority at the age of twelve, and consequently the three sons of Clotilda became straightway masters of their father's kingdom, although the eldest, Clodomir, could not have been more than seventeen years of age. With their half-brother, Theodoric, they divided the wide-spreading Frankish kingdom between them. Paris, Reims, Soissons, and Orleans became the capitals of as many kingdoms, administered, certainly as far as the last three were concerned, by mere children. It was the greatest of misfortunes for these princes that at such an early age they should have been deprived of their mother's admirable influence, and have been abandoned to all the seductions of royal power amid a society in which evil germs developed with an appalling facility.

In the cosmopolitan courts of the sixth century, the brutal barbarism of the Franks of Germanic origin and the refined decadence of the Franks of the earlier Roman civilisation mingled in a way that produced the most atrocious and repulsive corruption, from which few of the Merovingian princes escaped. The sons of Clovis learnt to give way to

all their passions, and in them there seemed to be intensified the luxurious and blood-thirsty temperament which distinguished the kings of this period. They were not wanting in certain noble qualities; brave, energetic, capable at times of sentiments of justice and mercy, and, even in the midst of their worst excesses, recognising the legitimate influence of religion in public affairs. But, in comparison with their father, they certainly verified the prediction of their grandmother, Basina, that the noble and magnanimous lion of Childeric's vision would be succeeded by ferocious bears and wolves.

The young princes were destined to fill to overflowing their mother's cup of sorrow, and to turn her years of widowhood into one long agony. Soon it was made clear to her that she stood alone in the world; the distinction conferred upon her by her virtues seemed to form a barrier around her, and kept her apart from the wild scenes in the midst of which her sons' lives were passed.

Had she been able to retain her daughter Clotilda by her side, her life might have been far happier. The two women might have lived for one another, and their dignified if melancholy existence would have recalled that of Caretena and her daughters, when they all three, like the penitents of a throne, lived a life of retirement at Geneva. But after a very few years the young princess was torn from her mother's side by the inexorable requirements of statecraft. Amalaric, king of the Visigoths, had asked her hand in marriage, and her brothers, flattered by the proposal, had hastened to give their

consent.¹ It is uncertain whether Clotilda was even consulted.

There was indeed cause for trembling in the idea of an alliance that should unite in the bonds of conjugal love the son of Alaric II. and the daughter of Clovis, and it required all the barbarism which ruled at that period over the native land of the Cid and of Chimène to accept it with equanimity. The fathers of the bride and the bridegroom had been sworn foes; one of them had deprived the other of the half of his kingdom, and had felled him on the battlefield. Had Amalaric forgotten the injury, and could he be relied on not to remember it in the future? The prospect was all the more gloomy that his actual request had been solely inspired by political considerations and consequently afforded no guarantee of the sentiments he might entertain towards his wife the day on which, grown indifferent to her charms, he might recall to mind that they were separated as much by filial piety as by religious education. For Amalaric was an Arian like all his people, and the fanaticism of the Visigoths was only too well known in France, where some years previously numerous victims of their persecutions had taken refuge.

It is more than probable that these gloomy forebodings haunted the mind of the mother whose child was about to be torn from her, but it is also probable that she cherished other and more inspiring hopes. She may have remembered that she herself had left the Genevan court under very similar cir-

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 1.

cumstances, in order to marry a pagan whom she had had the happiness to convert, and she may have nursed the hope that it would fall to the lot of her daughter to win over to the true faith both her husband and his people. Who can tell how frequently this question may not have arisen between the two women in the last sorrowful days that they were permitted to spend together? The younger Clotilda was to be the angel of reconciliation for the Visigoths and for Amalaric; she was to renew among them the glorious days of the conversion of the Franks; she was to be an instrument of fraternity between the two dynasties; she was to bridge over the river of blood. But the time came when mother and daughter had to say farewell. The young bride tore herself from her mother's arms and entered the royal carriage which was to convey her to Spain, followed by a long train of heavy waggons for the baggage and attendants. Clotilda was left more solitary than ever.

And soon there commenced the series of sorrows which the ambition of her unworthy sons brought upon her. The starting-point was the war with Burgundy. It was a most unholy quarrel and one that wounded their mother in her tenderest feelings. We have noted the friendly relations that were established between the two nations as the result of the happy reconciliation between Clovis and Gondebald. The Burgundians had become the faithful allies of France. They had furnished them with invaluable help in the war against the Visigoths, from which they had emerged with empty hands,

and they had borne almost the entire weight of Theodoric's attack on his way to help his Spanish relations. There is nothing to show that the disappointments of the campaign weakened in any way the sincerity of their friendship for the Franks. Indeed the king of Burgundy had only recently given the hand of his daughter in marriage to Theodoric, Clovis' natural son, who had led the Frankish soldiers during the wars of Aquitaine and Provence.

Yet a further consideration should have protected the Burgundian people from the arms of the conquering Franks. Their king, Sigismund, first cousin to Clotilda, seemed to be doubly attached to the family of the latter ever since he had put an end to the main cause of dissension between the two nations. The friend, and in a sense the pupil of St Avitus, he had embraced the Catholic faith during the life-time of his father, and following his example a number of prominent Burgundians had made their peace with the Church. Thus the entire conversion of Burgundy had become merely a question of time.

But Sigismund had not proved himself worthy of the triumph of the faith which he professed from the bottom of his heart. Possessed of generosity, elevation of mind and sincere religious feeling, he was nevertheless of feeble character and changeable humour and was subjugated in turn by the most diverse influences. After the death of St Avitus there was no one to guide his steps along the path of justice, and he allowed himself to fall under the domination of his second wife. The unhappy ascendancy that

she gained over him was the cause of all his misfortunes. She had conceived a violent aversion for her stepson Sigeric, the issue of her husband's first marriage. Tradition tells us that the boy had used insulting words to her one day that she had appeared in the royal jewels that had belonged to his mother. She took an oath to encompass the death of the unhappy youth, and by dint of perfidious insinuations and unblushing falsehoods, she succeeded in persuading her husband that his son was intriguing for the crown. Sigismund believed his wife, and Sigeric was strangled by his orders.¹

But the crime had scarcely been committed when the father's heart was filled with remorse for the deed. He flung himself wildly on his son's corpse, and in his despair covered it with tears and kisses. Then he hastened for refuge to the solitude of the monastery of Agaune, close to the tomb of St Maurice, the most celebrated sanctuary in Burgundy. There he spent long days in tears and penitential exercises imploring the forgiveness of God for his horrible crime. Perhaps he thought he had disarmed divine justice when he returned to Lyons after having instituted at Agaune the perpetual recitation of the Psalter so that voices might ever be engaged in prayer bearing upwards to God in an uninterrupted outpouring the cries of human sorrow and repentance. But, declares the contemporary chronicler with a sombre eloquence, divine vengeance still followed in his tracks.²

As regards the pretext on which the sons of Clovis

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 5.

² Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 5.

took up arms against their unhappy cousin we have no information, nor indeed is the question of much historic importance. The war may have been caused simply by that insatiable love of fighting and of glory which lies at the root of uncivilised nature, or again by that desperate avarice which gave men no rest so long as there remained anything to covet or to conquer. In either case it was a melancholy expedition to which Clodomir summoned his two brothers, Childebert and Clothair. For the first time a bitter struggle had broken out between Catholic sovereigns, and it was reserved for Clotilda to be a witness of this ungodly, doubly fratricidal war. By comparing the ill-starred expedition of 523 with that of the year 500, and by contrasting the moderation of Clovis with the ferocity of his sons we are able to see how much the moral atmosphere of the Frankish court had deteriorated. It shows us how entirely the young kings had flung off Clotilda's gentle influence, and how the mother of Clodomir no longer possessed the power enjoyed by the wife of Clovis.

With the help of his brother Gondomar, Sigismund did his best to resist the invasion of his territory. But at the very first encounter the Burgundian army was cut to pieces and the two brothers were compelled to seek safety in flight. Gondomar made good his escape; Sigismund was less fortunate. After having wandered for some time in the mountains disguising himself in the garb of a hermit, he came at last, led by his destiny, to beg for sanctuary at his beloved Abbey of St Maurice. It was on the cloister that the affections

were fixed of this religious-minded and unhappy prince, of whom history has forgiven the weaknesses, remembering only his crown of sorrows. Once again as on the morrow of his much-repented crime he came to place himself under the protection of the celestial patron of the sanctuary, hoping perhaps that his enemies would not dare cross the sacred threshold. But his crime was not yet fully expiated; the hand of God still weighed heavily on the murderer of Sigeric. In reality he had been drawn by traitors into the solitudes of Agaune; the enemy had long been watching for him there, and scarcely had he arrived at the gates of the monastery than he fell into their hands. He had the further sorrow of finding a large number of his own subjects among the Frankish soldiers, and it was a Burgundian of the name of Trapsta, who, like a second Judas, laid hands upon him and delivered him over to Clodomir. By him he was carried captive into France, and was imprisoned with his wife and children in the citadel of Coulmiers in Beauce, not far from Orleans, Clodomir's capital.¹

This was but the first act of the tragedy. Before long news was brought to France that Gondomar had again taken up arms, and that he was enforcing his authority over the whole of Burgundy. Clodomir immediately made hasty preparations for a fresh campaign. Previous to his departure sinister rumours spread through the country; it was said that he

¹ *Vita sancti Sigismundi*, c. IX. 9. In Jahn "die Geschichte der Burgundionen und Burgundiens"; Vol. II. p. 510; Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 6.

intended to murder his prisoners. We do not know whether his mother was informed of his iniquitous designs, nor yet whether, as is probable, she attempted to dissuade her son. But we do know that wise counsels were not wanting to him. For long years the people of Beauce treasured the memory of the generous intervention of St Avitus, Abbot of the celebrated monastery of Mici between the Loire and the Loiret, one of Clovis' principal foundations. On receipt of the first news of the intended outrage the saintly old man hurried to Orleans. "Spare your prisoner," he said to Clodomir, "and God will be with you and will give you the victory. But if not, you will fall into the hands of your enemy, and it will befall you, your wife and your children, as you yourself have done to Sigismund." But in his pride the savage king scorned the solemn warning; he had his prisoner put to death, together with his wife and two sons of tender years, Gislehad and Gondebald, and ordered their bodies to be flung into a well. Thus the whole of the elder branch of the Burgundian dynasty perished at a blow.¹ The Catholic Church has preserved the memory of the pious and penitent monarch; she has allowed him to retain the title of martyr, bestowed upon him by popular pity, and has permitted him to be venerated on her altars.

Clodomir had been the guilty instrument of a legitimate vengeance; the hour was now come in which he in his turn was to render up his account to divine justice. He left Burgundy in the spring of

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 6.

524 with the tranquil confidence of a victorious general who believes he has only to inflict a final blow on his prostrate foe. But he had not reckoned with a nation's despair. In response to an appeal from Gondomar all the Burgundians had united in a supreme effort to avenge their king and to defend their liberty. Clodomir having effected a junction with his brothers, attacked the Burgundian army at Vézeronce, between Lyons and Geneva, in the valley of the Rhone. The national pride of the Franks has tried in vain to represent the battle as a victory; in reality it was a terrible catastrophe in which the honour of the Frankish army, which until then had been held to be invincible, was broken. Clodomir fell at the head of his troops, and the sight of his head stuck upon a pike, his long flowing locks stained with blood floating in the breeze, struck terror into the hearts of his soldiers, who fled in confusion. "The conquerors," writes a Byzantine historian who has furnished us with the most trustworthy account of the day, "brought the war to an end in the most advantageous manner and on their own terms. As for the scattered remnants of the Frankish army, they were thankful to be allowed to regain their homes."¹

It is easy to conceive the effect that this crushing blow must have had on Clotilda. Clodomir was her eldest son; he had been, in a very literal sense, the child of her tears and her prayers, and it was he

¹ Agathias, I. 3, completed and rectified by Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 6.

whose miraculous recovery, obtained from heaven through his mother's entreaties, had prepared the way for the conversion of Clovis. She had dreamt a very different life for the child whose cradle had been surrounded by such noble and pious aspirations, and whose life had appeared to be the stake in a struggle between heaven and hell. Now he had perished through his own culpable folly in the midst of defeat and dishonour, and his mutilated corpse was lying unburied on foreign soil. His widow Gontheuca, in accordance with the barbarous customs of the age, became the wife of her brother-in-law Clothair,¹ and his children were handed over to their grandmother. They were all that remained to her of her son; a precious heritage to which the cupidity of his brothers laid no claim. Holding them to her heart, and surrounding them with all the tenderness of an anxious affection, she was able to lead once more a family life in their midst. As a mother her heart had been broken, but as a grandmother she had entered on a new life of hope and interest. All her maternal love concentrated itself upon the three little orphans, Theodoald, Gunther, and Clodoald. They were educated in princely fashion in the vast palace of the Thermæ, which Clotilda still inhabited, and were the pride and joy of their grandmother's life. It was her love for them which proved their ruin. Her son Childebert, the then king of Paris, was, so to speak, a daily witness of her devotion,

¹ Gregory of Tours, *loc. cit.*

and before long he took offence at the ardour of her affection, believing, not without some show of reason, that as soon as the children were of age their grandmother would do all in her power to secure them a kingdom, and that their uncles would see themselves compelled to renounce Clodomir's inheritance.

There was but one way of evading this dangerous possibility: by getting rid of the children before they had had time to create a party for themselves, or to support their pretensions by force of arms. The idea of putting them to death suggested itself at an early date to Childebert, who, like his brothers, was not withheld by any moral scruples when once his personal interests were at stake. Without wishing to bring forward the smallest excuse for so profoundly wicked a plot, we may admit that the laws of inheritance among the Franks were a direct incentive to such crimes. The Galic law did not recognise any rights of minors; it ignored equally the equitable principle of representation, and thus every succession as it arose became the exclusive property of those who were sufficiently powerful to enforce their claims. Childebert and Clodomir could therefore consider themselves in a certain sense as the rightful heirs of their brother, and hence it was easy for them to persuade themselves that the future claims of their nephews were as unjust as they were inconvenient.

However this may have been, Childebert, anxious to secure an accomplice, sent to the King of

Soissons who came to confer with him in Paris in the palace of the city. In this sinister interview, it was deliberately resolved with but little discussion to put the little princes to death. But considerable difficulties lay in the way of the execution of this plan. It was a by no means easy task to entice the children from the vigilant guardianship of their grandmother, and short of murdering them in her presence the assassins were not likely to get hold of them. Under these circumstances the unnatural sons had recourse to an odious stratagem. The Frankish chronicle, which has preserved a very vivid impression of the ghastly scene, seems to have confused some of the details, and it is not impossible that some legendary additions may have crept into the account that we have received from Gregory of Tours. Yet how heart-rending is the page in which, without commentary, and in all its primitive simplicity, he records the awful deed! The greatest dramatist of modern times has not been able to evoke greater pity by his account of the death of the sons of King Edward than is called forth by the halting language of the chronicler.

Childebert, having spread the report that the object of his interview with his brother was to discuss the elevation of his young nephews to the throne, Clotilda was deceived like everyone else, and without suspicion and even with joy she received the message sent to her by her sons, and which was conceived in these terms: "Send us the children, and we will make them kings." Full of delight she ordered a meal for the little princes,

and then handed them over to the envoys with the words: "I shall feel as though I had not lost my son when I see you on the throne." The children started in the high spirits natural to their age, convinced that they were going to be crowned; in reality they were going to meet their death.

Scarcely had they fallen into their uncle's hands than the sons of Clodomir were forcibly separated from their attendants and were treated as prisoners. After a short time the two kings sent another message to their mother, and for this purpose they selected a man of the very highest rank in Gaul. This was Arcadius, the grandson of Apollinarus Sidonius, and great-grandson of the Emperor Avitus. His family was the most illustrious throughout the ancient province of Auvergne, the classic land of devotion to Roman civilisation, and his father, Apollinarus, who had fought valiantly under Alaric at Vouillé, had, at a later date, filled the episcopal see of Clermont. But even this proud patrician family had not escaped from the universal decadence of the time. Apollinarus himself owed his episcopate to vile intrigues, and his son Arcadius, a servile flatterer of the new masters of Auvergne, recoiled at nothing in order to ingratiate himself in their favour. It was this descendant of an imperial race who presented himself before Clotilda with a sword in one hand and a pair of scissors in the other. "Your sons," he said, addressing the queen, "beg you to let them know what they are to do with the children, whether they are to cut off their hair with these scissors, or their heads with this sword."

The meaning of the words was plain to all. Long hair was the special privilege of the Merovingian princes, and was regarded as the emblem of their royal power; to deprive the boys of this natural adornment was tantamount to depriving them of their right to the crown, and henceforward their place would be, not on the throne, but in the cloister among the shaven heads that were of no account in the world. Such was the alternative that with all the obsequiousness of the courtier Arcadius came to offer to his sovereign at the bidding of her sons.

It is said that the unhappy woman, filled with horror and despair at this sudden destruction of all her most cherished hopes, exclaimed in the delirium of her grief: "If they are not to be kings like their father before them, I would rather see them dead than shaven." If indeed these words escaped her lips, she herself pronounced sentence of death on her much-loved grandchildren. For Arcadius did not give her time to recover herself, but hurried back to the two kings assuring them that they could proceed without fear as the queen had given her consent. They asked nothing further of the wretched man by whose base connivance they were enabled to throw the responsibility of the crime upon their saintly mother, but hastened to execute their diabolic scheme.

"Then there occurred in the palace of Childebert one of the most piteous scenes that history has recorded for us. The unhappy children when they saw their uncles' angry countenances, and the weapons they held in their hands, realised the fate

that was in store for them. In vain they attempted to escape from the royal assassins; Clothair seizing the elder by the arm plunged his dagger into his breast. While the young prince lay in his death-agony his younger brother flung himself at Childebert's feet imploring his mercy. What little there was of humanity left in the heart of the king of Paris was stirred by the prayers of the innocent victim, and with his eyes full of tears he besought of Clothair to spare the boy, even offering to ransom him from his own purse. But Clothair had already smelt blood and was carried away by murderous rage; in his anger he accused his brother of cowardice, and even threatened him with death should he attempt to hinder the execution of the plot which they had planned together. Then Childebert faltered: he pushed away the boy who had taken refuge in his arms and left him to Clothair, who quickly dealt with him as he had dealt with his elder brother. Afterwards by a cynical refinement of cruelty the governor and all the attendants of the princes were put to death. The elder of the two little victims was but ten years old, and his younger brother seven. Clodoald who was only five seems to have escaped as by a miracle from his uncles' hands. History merely records in a general way that he was rescued by some kind-hearted men, without detailing the precise circumstances. It is possible that owing to his extreme youth he was not handed over to his uncles at the same time as his brothers, and that he was hurried to a place of safety as soon as the sad news of their death was

received. The only secure refuge for him was the cloister, and, as a matter of fact, later traditions assure us that Clodoald became a monk in the abbey of Nogent near Paris, to which he left the name of St Cloud. Thus the prophetic words of the saintly abbot of Mici to Clodomir were realised to the full: God struck him in his own sons, and avenged the innocent blood shed at Coulmiers by the extermination of his race.”¹

The crime once perpetrated, the murderers did not dare to face their unhappy mother; they fled from Paris, the one to his own city of Soissons, the other to one of his palaces in the outskirts of the town. Clotilda restrained her bitter grief in order to pay the last honours to her murdered grandsons. She caused their bodies to be brought from the deserted palace and placed in coffins in order that they might be carried in procession with an accompaniment of mournful psalms to the Church of Mount Lutetia. Paris beheld the venerable queen, the widow of their greatest king, presiding alone at the obsequies of her grandchildren, while her own sons carried with them in their flight all the opprobrium of a dastardly crime. The royal crypt was opened to receive the unhappy victims, and their bodies, laid in stone sarcophagi of a proportionate size, were placed beside that of their grandfather. During thirteen centuries their bones rested undisturbed in the shadow of the national sanctuary under the protection of French patriotism. It was reserved for the Revolution to profane these innocent

¹ G. Kurth, *Clovis*, pp. 567-570.

memorials, and by scattering the ashes of the royal children to recall the savage cruelty of Childebert and of Clothair.

Thus the tomb closed over the last joys of Clotilda's life; standing erect near the gloomy abyss, she was but the phantom of a glorious past that would never return. With a broken heart and a soul entirely weaned from the world, she also hastened to quit Paris and took refuge in her beloved Tours close to the tomb of St Martin. From this time forward she but rarely visited the capital of France,¹ which had become unbearable to her, and her unnatural sons were freed from the presence of their saintly victim.

¹ *Raro Parisios visitans.* Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, II. 43.

CHAPTER VII

FRESH TRIALS

CLOTILDA'S cup of bitterness was not drained even after all these misfortunes. Fresh trials were in store for the unhappy mother. It seemed as though her heart were to be pierced as it were with swords in order that her maternity might resemble through its agony that of the Mother of Sorrows.

It will be remembered that her daughter Clotilda was given in marriage to king Amalaric, and we have already described the circumstances under which the marriage took place, and the vague hopes which may have deceived the mother and daughter as to the actual dangers of the union. We must now relate how far the reality surpassed in horror all that the most gloomy forebodings could have anticipated.

In order fully to understand the unhappy fate of the young Frankish princes, we must bear in mind the circumstances that surrounded her married life. From the earliest times the Visigoths had been the apostles of Arianism, which they had spread around them by force of arms, by diplomacy, by family alliances, and which was so fully identified with them that it was frequently spoken of as the Gothic

faith. They had been the persecutors of Catholicism from the time when they had first been able to give vent to their sectarian hatred with impunity. In Southern Gaul priests had been exiled or condemned to death, sanctuaries had been closed, altars profaned, and the whole priesthood threatened with gradual extermination. The Visigoths had only ceased from their cruel and remorseless war against the church when they saw themselves threatened by the avenging sword of Clovis. But, though refraining from active persecution, they had not in any sense renounced their fanatical hatred of the true faith; it was like a smouldering fire ready to break out afresh at any moment.

It might have been supposed that the advent of a Catholic queen would have tended to appease this violent antagonism; unhappily the presence of a daughter of Clovis had the very opposite effect. The unhappy princess was the object of a double hatred among the Visigoths, whose fanaticism against the Church was only equalled by their abhorrence of all who bore the name of Frank. It seems probable that the aversion that her husband soon displayed for her was mainly inspired by this twofold feeling among his people, which was sufficiently powerful to influence a sovereign far more determined than the feeble son of Alaric II. had proved himself to be. Whatever may have been the cause, life at Amalaric's court became quite intolerable for Clotilda. One stands amazed at the insults that the wretched husband permitted towards the princess whom he had invited to share his throne.

He ordered every kind of filth to be flung at her when she was on her way to the Catholic church, and on more than one occasion he beat her with cruel violence. At length, driven to despair, the unhappy queen took advantage of the presence of her brother Childebert in Auvergne, not far from the Spanish frontier, to implore him to come to her aid. She entrusted the messenger with a handkerchief stained with blood from injuries she had received from the hand of Amalaric. Filled with horror, and thirsting for vengeance, Childebert did not delay, but led his army forthwith on the road to Spain. The details of the campaign have not come down to us, but it is clear that the arm of the Visigothian tyrant displayed less vigour in battle than in the conjugal palace. Defeated near Narbonne where he had attempted to arrest the victorious advance of the Frankish army, he hastened to cross the Pyrenees and sought shelter behind the embattled walls of Barcelona. Childebert hurried in his wake and made himself master of the town. The first soldiers of the invading army penetrated within its gates at the very moment when the Visigothian king was about to take refuge on his ships which lay at anchor in the harbour. His evil fortune ordained that at the instant of stepping on board, he should suddenly remember some precious stones that he had left in his treasury; he wished to get possession of them, and he fancied that he should yet have time. In this he was mistaken. The Franks spread themselves so rapidly through the town that the road to the fleet was

cut off. Amalaric then tried to take refuge in a Catholic church, hoping that the sanctuary would be respected by an orthodox army. But the Temple of the living God was not fated to afford protection to the persecutor. Before he could cross the threshold he was struck by the lance of a Frankish soldier and fell dead in the street.

Clotilda was saved. The conqueror only waited to gather all the possible fruit from his victory, then he started back for France with his sister and all his booty. But the anxieties and sufferings she had undergone had been too much for the queen's health, and she died on the journey, having barely attained to the age of thirty. Childebert could only bear back her corpse to their mother.¹ The mournful procession had to pass through Tours on its way to Paris; it was there that the murderer of the sons of Clodomir presented himself before the widow of Clovis with the mortal remains of her daughter. We will not attempt to describe the interview; history has wisely drawn a veil over scenes which defy description, for there are tragedies in real life which far transcend anything that the most powerful imagination can conceive.

Once again Clovis' vaults were opened to receive into their eternal silence, the young queen whom the memory of the great king had not been able to protect. Less fortunate than her daughter, Clotilda continued to weep in the solitude of Tours tears that no one wiped away, for in the midst of her royal splendour she was as lonely and forsaken as

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 10.

the poorest widow in her kingdom. God alone lent an ear to the mournful voice which was like the voice of Rachel lamenting in Rama and which would not be comforted because her children were not.

There remained another drop of gall in Clotilda's cup of bitterness, and it pleased the Almighty that she should drink it to the dregs. After the deaths of Clodomir and Clotilda, Childebert and Clothair were the sole surviving members of her family. Although they had broken her heart by one of those crimes which it would seem as though a mother could never forgive, they were nevertheless her sons, and in spite of all their evil deeds she remained the more attached to them that they were in need of her pardon and pity. She avoided their company, she fled from their court, and we may well believe that they were objects of horror in her sight whenever she called to mind her murdered grandsons; nevertheless she prayed and wept for them, and retained for them the indefectible devotion of a Christian mother. Through them the royal line of Clovis was to be preserved, and as long as they lived they were as a link which bound her to the earth.

We can imagine then her horror when she learnt one day that the brothers had declared war on one another! Knowing their cruel natures she could entertain no doubts concerning the nature of the conflict; it was bound to be a war of extermination, and everything seemed to point to the verifications of her most gloomy forebodings.

We have no information concerning the origin of the quarrel between the two kings, nor is it

necessary to enquire into it. All the crimes of the Merovingians may be traced back to a single cause: their overwhelming ambition, or to put the matter in its truer light, their insatiable avarice. To increase at all costs their lands, their men, the amount of their revenues was the main preoccupation of these wild rulers. It was only overborne by another, equally intense, that of extracting from their wealth the greatest possible amount of pleasure and enjoyment. These same men who had dyed their hands in the blood of the sons of Clodomir, did their utmost to rid themselves of their nephew Theodebert, on the death of his father Theodoric in 534. But the young prince defended himself with so much energy that they were forced to relinquish their scheme of dispossession.¹ Then Childeburt, whose resources were infinite, seems to have said to himself that it would be better to have a man of so powerful a stamp as a friend rather than a foe. He therefore invited Theodebert to his court, adopted him as his son, and overwhelmed him with costly presents. Then, when he had bound him to himself with the bonds of gratitude and of interest he unfolded the scheme which doubtless he had been nursing from the first. The plan was that they should attack Clothair simultaneously, and divide the spoils of his kingdom between them.

The latter was filled with dismay when he learned that the combined forces of Austrasia and the kingdom of Paris were marching against him. His own kingdom of Neustria was the smallest division of the

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 23.

ancient kingdom of Clovis, nor did he possess the means to resist so powerful a coalition. Clothair therefore withdrew to the most distant portion of his kingdom, to the forest of Brotonne near Caudebec in Normandy, and entrenched himself there to the best of his ability by means of great trunks of fallen trees. Here he awaited the enemy, feeling that his last day had come, unless God should interpose in his behalf.

The Merovingians, in the midst of their crimes, retained a strong religious sense, the one counterpoise which stayed the utter ruin of their moral nature. Our chronicler assures us that Clothair put all his faith in the divine mercy. But other prayers beside his own—the prayers of his mother—ascended to heaven and interceded on his behalf. Clotilda did not attempt to intervene between these violent men bent on the destruction of one another: she made no effort to touch the heart of Childebert or to deter him from his fratricidal schemes; she was too intimately acquainted with her sons to expect anything either of their humanity or of their filial piety. In the bitterness of her grief she flung herself at the feet of the celestial friend who for so many years had been the depository of her sorrows. Day and night she lay prostrate before the tomb of St Martin, beseeching God, by the intervention of the holy confessor, to have pity on the blood of Clovis and not to permit an unnatural war between the sons to whom she had given birth.

Meanwhile Childebert, with the help of his nephew, had pursued Clothair like some wild beast

through the dense forest; he had succeeded in coming up with him, and on the very next morning he proposed forcing the line of his intrenchments. But just when the assault was about to begin, the most terrible thunderstorm broke out, which tore down the tents and scattered the whole camp. Heavy hailstones poured down on the assailants in the midst of thunder and lightning, and the only means left to the soldiers to protect themselves at least in part from the violence of the deluge, was to lie flat on the ground, covering themselves with their shields. The horses, terrified by the lightning, broke away from their tethers and galloped in all directions; some were brought back from a distance of twenty *stadia*, but a large number were never recaptured. While this wild scene was in progress in the camp of the assailants, we learn, on the authority of the chronicler, that in Clothair's camp not only the thunder could not be heard, but even the wind did not blow nor did a drop of rain fall. Overwhelmed with terror at the sight of so portentous a marvel, the allied kings prostrated themselves on the ground in the midst of their troops, did penance and begged pardon of the Almighty. Then they sent messengers to Clothair with proposals of peace. An understanding was quickly arrived at, and the invaders retired each into his own territory. There can be no doubt, concludes our witness, that this miracle was obtained through the prayers of the queen and the intercession of St Martin.¹

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 28.

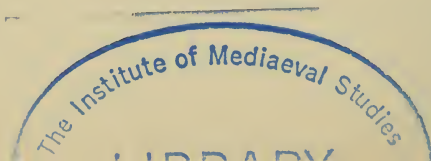
Thus God had taken pity on Clotilda, and her ardent prayers had prevailed on behalf of the guilty sons of Clovis. Her bruised heart regained a certain measure of consolation after passing through this supreme trial in which she had been conscious of the outpouring of the divine mercy upon her, and she was permitted to spend the last years of her tragic career in recollection and in peace.

CHAPTER VIII

CLOTILDA'S SANCTITY

IN the preceding pages we have given a general sketch of the tragic circumstances which poisoned Queen Clotilda's life, and filled all the sorrowing years of her widowhood. But these reiterated blows which overwhelmed without crushing her, were not the sole events of her mortal career. The valiant Christian queen bore her trials with exemplary courage, giving thanks to God for all that came from His hand, and she passed through life, resigned and penitent, scattering around her the lavish gifts of an inexhaustible charity. It is with this side of her career that we have now to deal.

History, though it neglects so much, generally records the founders of churches. And it is not surprising that Clotilda's name should reappear more frequently in these later years, when the freedom of her widowhood allowed her greater scope in her good works. The Church, more grateful than mankind, has always taken a pleasure in recording in her annals the names of her benefactors, and has transmitted them from generation to generation, as a precious legacy for all time. And it is only just that it should be so. In the early centuries, when social life had barely come in-



to existence, there was no higher or more civilising work than the building of a church or the founding of a monastery. Every time that on the soil of ancient Gaul there rose up a new tower surmounted by a cross, civilisation had gained a fresh citadel, a further colony. And issuing from each of these sanctuaries, enriched by the intelligent piety of their founders, the eye of faith could discern that stream of grace and of life of which it is written in the Liturgy: "I saw water flowing from the right side of the temple, and all to whom that water came were saved."

We are acquainted with only a small number of Clotilda's foundations, and we have no means of ascertaining the precise date of their origin, nor yet whether they belong to Clovis' lifetime. Our account therefore is very far from being either complete or methodical, and we specially regret that in most instances we can only record the plain fact without any of the precise details which add so much to the colour and interest of history. But in spite of all these shortcomings, we trust that our sketch, however fragmentary it may be, will not fail to interest the pious reader. Even the faintest indications of their mortal careers, which the saints have left us, should be treasured up with a jealous care, and we therefore make no apology for passing from province to province in our attempt to trace the sacred foot-prints of one who traversed France in order to propagate the kingdom of God.

One of the earliest of Clotilda's foundations was the convent for women that she erected at Chelles, near

Paris, in honour of St George.¹ Chelles, as we have seen, was one of the royal *villas*, and we are justified in assuming that Clotilda resided there more than once during the happy years when she reigned by Clovis' side. It is therefore highly probable that it was in the days of her prosperity that she decided to erect this refuge for the handmaidens of Christ. There, in later years, in religious intercourse with sanctified souls, she was able to enjoy that spiritual sweetness which the worldly atmosphere of a court could not supply. And we may note also, by the way, Clotilda's devotion to a saint, who, throughout all the Middle Ages, was the pattern of Christian knights, and who was also, in a sense, the special patron of her warlike husband.

It is interesting to call to mind in this connection that Clovis himself, doubtless in conjunction with his queen, had paid special honour to the military saint. The Monastery of Buralle, near Cambrai, probably the earliest of his religious foundations, is also dedicated to St George.² Thus we seem to trace a unity of intention in the good works of husband and wife. Each of them was in the habit of placing the campaigns of the king under the protection of the saint, who was regarded in those times as the arbiter of battles and the protector of warriors.

A century later another saint, who was also Queen of France, revived and continued Clotilda's

¹ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, c. XVIII., in the *Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum*, ed. Krusch, vol. II. p. 506.

² *Gesta Episcoporum Cameracensium*, II. 11, in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, vol. VII.

work at Chelles. We learn from the life of St Bathilda that this pious queen enlarged the church and the convent, and increased the number of the nuns.¹ This doubly-royal foundation enjoyed a high reputation. As early as the seventh century the daughters of the noblest families in England came there to be initiated into the religious life, and many princesses of royal blood took the veil within its precincts. Such was the origin of Chelles; no other religious house in France can boast of owing its existence to two saints both of whom wore the crown "of the most glorious kingdom next to Heaven."

If conjugal love inspired Clotilda's devotion to St George, was it love of her country or affection for St Geneviève which earned for St Germain of Auxerre the pious veneration of the Frankish queen? Auxerre was the last of the Frankish towns on the Burgundian frontier, and it contained the tomb of the saint who first discerned the sanctity of Geneviève and foretold the designs of God concerning the humble virgin of Nanterre. Clotilda professed a special veneration for the great confessor who had been one of the leading lights of the Church in Gaul. She determined that he should not continue to repose in the humble oratory of St Maurice; she therefore rebuilt the basilica on an enlarged plan with much interior decoration, and from that time the church has borne the name of the illustrious saint whose bones repose beneath its pavements. Clotilda came in person to preside

¹ *Vita Sanctae Balthildis*, c. VII. and X. in *op. cit.*

over this important undertaking, and was accompanied by a bishop named Lupus, from Upper Burgundy, who died during his residence at Auxerre. The queen decided that he should find a last resting-place within the walls of the basilica, and as late as the ninth century a marble tablet was in existence containing the epitaph of the aged prelate, and recording the pious liberality of Clotilda.¹

The devotion of our Saint towards the Prince of the Apostles displayed itself in a large number of foundations. We have already mentioned the church of Mount Lutetia, which, previous to St Denis, served as the burial-place of the kings of France. We must mention further St Pierre-le-Puellier at Tours, where tradition asserts that Clotilda also founded a convent for women, and where, in the opinion of many scholars, she passed her declining years. Her biographer, writing in the tenth century, ascribes to her the foundation of the Church of St Peter in the suburbs of Laon, where, as in Paris, she established a college of Canons Regular. According to the same writer, she also enlarged and enriched the Church of St Peter at Reims in memory of the baptism of Clovis, and she rebuilt the old Monastery of St Peter, near the gates of Rouen, which had previously been dedicated to St Denis.² These records are not all of equal authenticity, and the two latter especially have been falsified in more than one particular, but none the

¹ Heric, *Gesta Episcoporum Antissiodorensium*.

² *Vita Sanctae Chrotildis*, c. XIII.

less they contain an incontestable foundation of historic truth. We must remember, moreover, that the early dedication of most of the Churches of St Peter was that of the Twelve Apostles; tradition clearly establishes the fact as regards the churches of Paris and of Rouen, and we are justified in assuming it to be true of other sanctuaries. Very frequently St Peter only gave his name to a church because he was the first of the Twelve, the piety of the times associating the whole company of the Apostles with the devotion rendered to their head.

We have yet to speak of Clotilda's last foundation, that of Notre-Dame-des-Andelys, on the Seine not far from Rouen. It is the one that is best known to us, and that has preserved the most vivid and grateful recollection of its founder. In the tenth century a story was current of a miraculous circumstance connected with the building of the sanctuary, and we reproduce it here in the words of the ancient author, given as closely as a translation will allow : "The valley of the Seine did not produce wine, but none the less the workmen employed on the building appealed to the queen to supply some. While she was considering how to meet the demand, a spring of pure water was discovered not far from the works, exquisite to behold and delicious to the taste. And it was revealed in a dream to St Clotilda, that if the workmen reiterated their demand for wine, she was to send them by one of her servants a draught of water from this spring. The next day, it being mid-summer and the weather exceedingly sultry, the workmen again clamoured noisily for wine,

mingling the name of the Saint in their complaints. As soon as the news reached her, the servant of God, in obedience to the commands she had received, sent them a draught from the spring. Hardly had the men tasted it than they discovered that the water was changed into wine, and they declared that they had never drank anything so delicious. They came to find the queen, and bowing down before her offered her their thanks. But she, hearing of the miracle that had taken place, attributed it not to her own merits but to the divine mercy, and ordered her servant to reveal the truth to no one. It must be added that the miracle continued as long as the monastery was in course of erection, that it only took place for the benefit of Clotilda's workmen, and that for all other persons who drank from the fountain the water remained unchanged. When the monastery was entirely completed, the miracle ceased, and the spring resumed its natural flavour, which it has retained to this day."¹

Such is the legend. Turning to the historical record we find that the convent of Notre-Dame-des-Andelys shared with that of Chelles the honour of being one of the religious houses to which the Anglo-Saxons, soon after their conversion, preferred to send their daughters to be instructed in the religious life.² Thus, by her monastic foundations, Clotilda was able to prolong the apostolic mission that she had begun in the royal household, nor must

¹ *Vita Sanctae Chrotildis*, c. XII.

² The Venerable Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, III. 8.

we forget that it was Bertha, Queen of Kent, one of her own great grand-children, who played among the Anglo-Saxons the part that she herself had played among the Franks.

All these memories of Clotilda's religious activity can only represent a very small proportion of what she actually accomplished, but at least they possess the merit of giving us some slight indication of her manner of life. Several of these sanctuaries, erected by Clotilda, are still standing, and perpetuate throughout the ages the beneficent action of the saintly queen. Everywhere that prayer is offered up in the churches that she built fourteen centuries ago, we may say that she is still present by her works, and neither time nor revolutions can overturn the throne of the first Queen of France.

Of St Clotilda's generosity in other forms no records remain to us. The proofs of her charity towards private persons have perished with them, and it is only by an exceptional chance that the records of a single example have been preserved. In the general lack of information on the subject, every detail becomes of importance, and moreover the episode we are about to relate is so characteristic of the times that we cannot refrain from a hasty summary.

A priest of Clermont, named Anastasius, had received from the queen a gift of land, together with the title-deeds which set forth his right of possession. At this time the episcopal see of Clermont was held by one of the melancholy representatives of the Frankish clergy of those

days, the infamous Cautinus, whose repulsive personality has been branded by Gregory of Tours. This double-dealing bishop wished to make use of his authority in order to deprive the poor priest of his land. Anastasius held firmly to his rights, nor could the most cruel tortures induce him to yield. At length he was able to escape from the hands of his tormentor, and hastened to lay a complaint before King Clothair, who interceded energetically on his behalf, and compelled the avaricious prelate to respect his mother's gift.¹ Thus the most ancient Merovingian deed of gift of which we have authentic knowledge, issued from the hand of our Saint, and testifies to an act of generosity performed by her.

We would give much to be able to retrace further examples of this nature, and to walk once again in the charitable footsteps of the widowed queen. But the shadows of the past become ever more impenetrable, and it is only here and there, as though by chance, that a faint glimmer of light illumines amid the prevailing gloom the most prominent figures of the time. The memory of Clotilda has naturally shared in the common fate of her contemporaries, though far from her being a special sufferer, it may be said that the blind chance of history has treated her with a certain favour. Had she retired to any other refuge save that of Tours, or had it not happened that, a generation later, Tours became the episcopal see of the first historiographer of France, we should have known literally nothing of her existence after the murder of

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, IV. 12.

Clodomir's sons, and we should have been deprived of the last pages of her life, which are at once the most touching and most clearly outlined. And undoubtedly something would be missing to the history of France, had the student not been able to follow through the glories and crimes of those early centuries, the chaste and silent figure of the royal penitent who, draped in mourning robes, spent her life in prayer for her family and her people.

Guided by our chronicler, we can follow her into the intimacy of her obscure and prayerful existence during the last peaceful years of her life. We have seen how she withdrew to Tours, which was probably one of the towns included in her dowry, attracted thither by her devotion to St Martin. She constituted herself the protector of his shrine, enriching and adorning it with offerings, and it was there that she spent the happiest hours of her life in spiritual communion with her celestial patron, who, it will be remembered, had been the means of warding off from her the most mortal blow that a mother's heart can receive. The people of Tours preserved an affectionate memory of the illustrious lady whom their holy patron had attracted within their walls. And when, a generation after her death, the bishop of the town took up his pen in order to record the early history of the Franks, everyone was able to tell him of Clotilda, and thus, assisted by popular reminiscences, he was enabled to preserve for us the clearest and most reliable portrait that has come down to us of the royal lady.

It is essential to realise the position held by the

saint in the town which belonged to her, and which represented, in a sense, the capital of the kingdom of her widowhood. She enjoyed sovereign power as long as she lived, and it was only after her death that the authority of her sons penetrated within its walls. All the public officials were dependent upon her. She occupied towards the Church at Tours the same position of combined deference and influence which had formerly been filled by Clovis; that is to say, that while humbly bowing before the spiritual authority of the bishop, she enjoyed, as soon as the episcopal see became vacant, the supreme right of nominating the future occupant. It is only by bearing these facts in mind that we are able to understand how on two separate occasions the queen was able to intervene in a decisive manner in the episcopal elections of Tours. Several bishops succeeded one another during the thirty-four years of Clotilda's rule. Of the six elections that took place between the years 511 and 545, we know of two occasions on which the fact of her intervention has been clearly established by history. The first occasion, if local tradition is to be trusted, presented some rather curious features. At the death of Licinius, the prelate who had enjoyed the honour of receiving Clovis on his return from the war in Aquitaine, there happened to be two Burgundian bishops at Tours who had been driven from their sees by the Arians, and had placed themselves under the protection of the pious queen. Clotilda ordained that the two bishops should sit together in the episcopal chair; side by side they administered the

diocese and died two years later at a ripe old age.¹ Another Burgundian named Difinius, who, like his predecessors, was a *protégé* of the queen, then ascended the episcopal throne. Clotilda placed large sums of money at his disposal, but the bishop would only make use of them for ecclesiastical purposes. His death took place at the end of eleven months.² Of his four successors, who were undoubtedly elected with the approval of the queen, the first, Ommatius, was a member of an important senatorial family of Auvergne; Leo, abbot of St Martin, who is referred to as a clever carpenter, seems to have been of humble extraction; Francilion was descended from one of the patrician families of Poitou, and Injuriosus was the son of plebeian parents at Tours. Thus men of every nationality and rank were to be found occupying the see of Tours, and we may presume that the queen, indifferent to merely social distinctions, made use of her influence to promote men of real merit.³

Other chronicles of Touraine show us Clotilda devoting herself to deeds of charity; these have been recorded by Gregory of Tours in his collection of "Miracles of St Martin," and we may well allow so trustworthy a narrator to speak in his own words:

"A certain Theodomund, who was both deaf and dumb, came to visit the tomb of the Saint. Day after day he hurried to the basilica, and there, prostrate in prayer, he moved his lips unable to

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, X. 31, p. 446 (ed. Krusch).

² Gregory of Tours, X. 31.

³ „ *ibid.*

produce any sound. He prayed with so much fervour that he was frequently seen to shed tears in the course of his silent adoration. If out of pity worshippers gave him alms, he immediately distributed them to other needy persons. During three years his devotion had led him to be one of the most assiduous worshippers at the shrine, when one day, warned by divine grace, he came and stood before the altar, and while he was there with eyes and hands lifted up to heaven, a sudden rush of blood burst from his lips. To see him groaning, and spitting out the clots of blood, one would have thought he had received some horrible wound in his throat. But while the blood was still dripping from his lips, he realised that the bonds of his ears and his tongue had burst, and standing up, with clasped hands and eyes lifted to heaven, he gave utterance to these first words: 'I give thanks to thee, most blessed Martin, who by opening my lips hast permitted me to devote to thy praise the first words I have been able to utter.' The bystanders, filled with awe and admiration at so great a miracle, asked him if he had also regained his hearing, and he replied that he could hear everything they said perfectly well. After he had thus been restored to health, St Clotilda, out of devotion to St Martin, took charge of him and placed him in the school for young clerics, where he learnt the whole of the psalter by heart. It was the will of God that he should become a competent clerk and spend many years in the service of the Church."¹

¹ Gregory of Tours, *De Virtutibus sancti Martini*, I. 7.

Such are a few of the memories that St Clotilda has left at Tours; we have not been able to refrain from including them reverently in our history, in which we have been anxious to enshrine the most minute incidents of so saintly a career. But at the time when these memories were first committed to writing, the inhabitants of Tours seem only to have preserved incidents which are more or less indirectly connected with her biography. It is the whole union of edifying traits and works of charity, the sweet perfume of a penitent and mortified existence which has left on the public mind the deep and touching impression which in our turn we have attempted to reproduce, and which earned for the Saint, almost from the day of her death, the honours of public devotion.

In her private life and her daily habits, in that portion of her existence in which were concentrated the most sacred emotions of the soul, Clotilda reproduced all the noble qualities of her mother added to those more touching traits which are the outcome of sufferings borne with Christian resignation. Thus in her old age she carried on the traditions of holiness which she had learnt at her mother's knee, and we can see here a proof of the ineffaceable advantage of a Christian education, in the midst of a barbarous society opposed to the exercise of the chaste and humble feminine virtues.

Clotilda was an example to all Christian widows. And it may be as well to remind the reader that Christianity is the only religion that has glorified the widow and has raised her state almost to the

height of a dignity in the communion of the faithful. Apart from the exaltation of virginity, nothing in the Church of Christ has tended more to the elevation of the female sex than the honour paid to widowhood, which has become, so to speak, a new school of Christian perfection and almost a religious order. Count, if you can, the vast number of chaste and touching faces which Christian widowhood has led to the gates of heaven,—faces lit up by the resigned melancholy of a smile too tender to be mournful, and which if it still retains the memory of this world's bitterness, reflects only the beauty of things eternal.

Clotilda belongs to this family of saints. Public veneration already encompassed her while she was passing, gentle and tender-hearted, through a world to whose joys she had become a stranger, but with whose sorrows she ever remained familiar. It is pleasant to record here, breaking the long silence that has enveloped the greater portion of her life, the eloquent testimony which was paid her by her contemporaries. It was put in writing in the next generation by the father of French history himself, in a society still familiar with the figure of the Saint, and under the shelter of the sanctuary round which her virtues had blossomed. No other voice can testify to her holiness with equal authority, and it is for us a piece of great good fortune that we are able to conclude our account with the strong and touching words of the historian :

“Queen Clotilda conducted herself in a way to be honoured by all. Her almsgiving was unceasing.

She passed her nights watching; she was always a model of chastity and of virtue. With an engaging generosity she distributed her possessions to churches and monasteries, and provided sanctuaries with all that was needful. She appeared to be not a queen, but in very truth a servant of God. Faithful to His service, she did not allow herself to be carried away by the royal power of her sons, nor by the wealth and ambition of the century, but she attained to grace through humility.”¹

A re-echo of these words is to be found in the Life of the Saint, although the latter, being of later date, has not the authority of a contemporary record: “She who had previously worn robes of silk and of gold, now clothed herself in plain and coarse material; she renounced royal banquets, in order to live on bread and vegetables and water.”²

Such, after her fortieth year, was the humble and mortified life of the woman who had occupied the most powerful throne in Europe; such it continued to be until she had reached her seventieth year. It was on June 3rd, 545, that the expected hour of her delivery sounded, and although Gregory of Tours does not supply many details, we quote his account of the last moments of our Saint's life:

“She learnt from the revelation of an angel that the day of her vocation was at hand. Then, rejoicing in the Lord, she prayed and repeated the words, ‘To Thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul. In Thee, O my God, I put my trust.’ Then, feeling herself

¹ Gregory of Tours, *H. F.*, III. 18.

² *Vita Sanctae Chrotildis*, c. 11.

dragged down by bodily illness, she took to her bed without, however, giving up her hours of prayer or her distribution of alms. But this servant of Christ had nothing more to give, for she had exhausted the royal treasury paving her way to heaven by pouring it into the hands of the needy. She therefore sent a messenger to her sons, Childebert and Clothair, begging them to come to her. The two kings hastened to obey. The servant of God predicted to them several things which had been revealed to her from on high, and which, subsequently, proved to be true. On the thirtieth day after the warning had been vouchsafed her, she begged to receive Last Unction, and, strengthened by the Holy Viaticum, she died confessing the Holy Trinity. Her soul, borne to heaven by the hands of angels, was given a place in the celestial choir. She departed from her body in the first hour of the night, on the 3rd of June. At the instant of her quitting the world a great light filled the house as though it were midday, and an exquisite perfume pervaded the air so that it seemed to the bystanders as though they were smelling incense and other sweet spices. The light and the perfume continued in the room until the day dawned and the sun shone in all its splendour.”¹

An imposing procession led by the two kings to the chant of funeral psalms, conveyed the sacred remains of the widow of Clovis from Tours to Paris. The grief was universal in the city of St Martin as the body was carried away of one who had scattered

¹ *Vita Sanctae Chrotildis*, c. 14.

so many benefactions around her. All along the route the population hastened to meet the mournful procession which made known to France that she had lost the guardian angel of the royal dynasty. The church of Mount Lutetia, which the people had already begun to speak of as the Church of St Geneviève, received into its crypt the mortal remains of its foundress. The body of St Clotilda was laid to rest in a stone sarcophagus by the side of her husband, and there, surrounded by the objects of her affection, she slept, while awaiting the hour of the Resurrection, the sound and peaceful sleep of the weary pilgrim.

CHAPTER IX

THE POSTHUMOUS GLORY OF ST CLOTILDA

FROM a very early date popular gratitude honoured the memory of Clotilda in the same way as the saints are honoured, by conferring on her public veneration. This spontaneous homage, springing from the heart of the nation and consecrated by religious authority almost on the very morrow of her death, is like the seal placed on the accumulation of facts which establish the heroic degree of her virtues. In cases of this kind the tradition of veneration is of all testimonies the most convincing and the most unimpeachable. When this testimony is found to be in accord with all the evidence of history, and that it is contradicted by none, the proofs of sanctity are established and no one has the power to annul them.

It is therefore with good cause that the knees of the faithful have ever been bent before the memory of St Clotilda, although, like many other saints of the period, she has never been made the subject of a regular process of canonisation. And it is fitting, before we bring this history to a close, that we should say a few words concerning that which the Bollandists would term her "posthumous

glory," that is to say, the religious homage that was paid to her memory by a Christian people.

When the mortal remains of Clotilda were laid to rest by the side of Clovis, they were brought into contact, in the fraternity of the tomb, with those of another saint whom Clotilda had loved, and to whom she herself had granted the hospitality of a last resting-place. This was Geneviève, the heroine of the sixth century, who, as we have already seen, enjoyed among the grateful Parisians a popularity which is almost without parallel in the history of the capital. Geneviève, in entering into possession of the church of Mount Lutetia, seemed to fill the whole building with the radiance of her sanctity. Soon the basilica came to be regarded as specially hers: it was no longer known by its former dedication to the Twelve Apostles, nor even to St Peter; the public remembered nothing save that the virgin saint slept there, and henceforward the sanctuary was known by no other name than hers. And by an extraordinary reversal of positions, Clovis and his descendants came to be regarded in their last resting-place merely as the guests of St Geneviève.

Clotilda slept beside Geneviève, and shared in the glory which enveloped the tomb of her friend. The daughter of kings took her place beside the daughter of the people, and, as in life, so in death the halo of sanctity united the two sister-souls, no longer separated by the vain social distinctions of the world. The glory of the queen was in no wise eclipsed by the more vivid glory of the virgin. Clotilda never ceased to share in the honours that were

decreed to St Geneviève. She also had the day of her birth marked in the Calendar, and commemorated in the liturgical office, of which the text has been preserved, and which has always been dear to the Church of France. And, according to the testimony of several martyrologies, numerous miracles testified at different times to the legitimacy of the veneration with which she was regarded by the faithful.

At a very early period the remains of the queen had been enclosed in a richly ornamented shrine. Restored at various times, the last occasion being in the sixteenth century, this shrine was one of the popular treasures of Paris. It was of silver gilt; at one end there was a representation of Clotilda with Clovis, at the other the Saint was depicted in religious attire standing by the fountain of Les Andelys, which had flowed at her bidding. On the sides were represented a number of saints who were especially venerated in Paris and in the church of St Geneviève.¹

We are informed by ancient writers that every time a danger threatened Paris the reliquary of St Clotilda figured with that of St Geneviève in the processions which were in the habit of traversing the town. This was specially the case during the many troublous periods in Paris in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Thus there was perpetuated from the depths of the tomb the graceful sovereignty of Clotilda over the nation, which more

¹ See a description and reproduction of the shrine in the Bollandists' *Acta Sanctorum*, vol. I. for June (June 3rd), p. 293.

than anyone she had contributed to raise to the position of eldest daughter of the Church. Through the long centuries the confidence and love of the people went out unceasingly to their first Christian queen, and their patriotism was nourished by sentiments that were originally inspired by faith.

But public devotion to St Clotilda was not confined within the walls of the capital, and at an early date fragments of her relics served to excite popular enthusiasm in the provinces. The ravages of the Normans in the ninth century were the cause of the first of these posthumous migrations. On this occasion the reliquary of the Saint was conveyed to the castle of Vivières (Aisne) in which the parish church was situated, and remained there throughout the troubled period. When tranquillity was restored, the clergy of St Geneviève requested the Canons of Vivières to return the precious treasure, but, judging from the dismemberment that ensued, the latter must have experienced great difficulty in parting with it. Ultimately the head and one arm were left at Vivières, and the remainder of the body, with the reliquary, was conveyed back to Paris. At a later period towards the year 1149, when the Chapter of Vivières adopted the Rule of Prémontré, the greater number of the Canons left to found a new Abbey in the neighbourhood, at Valsery, of which Vivières was to be a dependent priory. In 1234 the two houses divided the relics of the Saint into equal parts, and each received a share of the head and the arm. The portion which was left at Vivières was enclosed in a wooden bust and has been

reverently preserved to our own day, although during the French Revolution it was found necessary to bury the bust in order to save it from profanation. In 1865, when it was opened by M. Henry Congnet, dean of the Chapter of Soissons Cathedral, the main portions of a skull were discovered within, together with a parchment from the abbot of Valsery, dated 1234, and setting forth the facts that we have related. Moreover, devotion to the Saint is still to be met with at Vivières. A fountain dedicated to St Clotilda is to be seen there, and near by are the ruins of a chapel dedicated to her.

“During the time of the yearly pilgrimage from the eve of June 3rd, and including the ensuing six weeks, the pilgrims come and drink the water, which, in reference to the thread-like weeds floating on the surface, they speak of in popular language as covered with the hair of St Clotilda. The intercession of the Saint is specially begged for to save them from fever. Every year some twelve or fifteen hundred pilgrims visit the spring.”¹

As regards the relics of the Saint at Valsery, they were reverently preserved until the break-up of the old regime. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, we hear of their existence from Hugh, abbot of Étival and chronicler to the Premonstratensian Order. After the Revolution they came into possession of the church of Coeuvres. Coeuvres is well known as having been the residence of the beautiful Gabrielle d'Estrées; it is more interesting

¹ Mgr. P. Guerin, *Les Petits Bollandistes*, vol. VI. p. 427, founded on a communication from M. Henri Congnet in 1866.

to learn that it is also one of the resting-places of St Clotilda. The queen who received from heaven the lilies of France, thus became a fellow-citizen of the favourite who helped to bring dishonour upon them. In the history of modern society, we frequently come upon such contrasts between the beauty of the Christian ideal, and the scandals of the pagan reaction.

Other portions of the body of the Saint were preserved in a massive reliquary in the Abbey Church of Joyenval (Seine et Oise). Possibly they were the origin of the legend to which we have already referred, and which is the counterpart to that of the Sainte Ampoule at Reims. The story, which enjoyed great credit during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, related how Clotilda received the escutcheon of France, consisting of three golden *fleurs de lys* on a blue ground brought by an angel from heaven, from the hands of a hermit who instructed her to convey it to Clovis. At the time of the suppression of the Abbey in 1791, M. Terrier, the mayor of Chambourcy, ordered the reliquary to be solemnly transferred to the parish church of his village, where it remained until 1793, made fast with iron chains. When, in spite of these precautions, the revolutionists succeeded in destroying the reliquary, the devoted mayor managed to get possession of the bones and enclosed them in a linen bag which was carefully sewn up and sealed with his seal. The bag was only reopened in 1837, when the relics were deposited in a new shrine; they were disturbed once more in 1863, when a small fragment was

presented to the new church of St Clotilda in Paris.

In the presence of these traditions of devotion, all of which enjoy a considerable authority, what are we to think of the pretensions of the Abbey du Trésor, at Vernon in Normandy, the nuns of which establishment asserted that they possessed the head of the Saint? We do not possess the necessary information for deciding this point, which may, perhaps, excite the zeal of some local archæologist. What is certain is that when in 1641 the authorities of St Geneviève opened the shrine of St Clotilda at the request of Louis XIII., who wished to possess a fragment of the relics, the head was no longer there, nor could anyone give any information as to how it could have disappeared.

To conclude the subject, we may add that the shrine was again opened in 1656 in order that a rib might be presented to Notre Dame des Angelys, a church which had certainly merited the gift by the fervour of the devotion which was cultivated there to the first Queen of France.

Such are the main though by no means all the facts that have come down to us concerning the posthumous glory of St Clotilda. By the Christian soul the history of the growth of devotion to any saint should never be overlooked, for it marks the spreading of a beneficent influence and the expansion of a civilising light. From the altars on which he is venerated the saint continues to speak and to act, and the apostolic power of the virtues he has practised during his mortal life is multiplied a

hundredfold. Who can measure the force of the holy renunciations and the generous resignation which widows and Christian mothers have drawn from the feet of St Clotilda in that spiritual converse which prayer renews day by day between the saints in heaven and the suffering souls on earth?

One day, after having reverently preserved the memory of its purest national glories throughout twelve long centuries, the French nation, in a fit of delirium, resolved to tear up with its own hands the strong and living roots that bound it to the past. In 1793, the hour when all the tombs were violated, and all the glories profaned, the rage of the revolutionaries vented itself upon the sanctuary of the first French king. The vaults of the church were rifled, and the sacred ashes of St Geneviève flung to the winds; it was only with the greatest difficulty that an Oratorian succeeded in rescuing the bones of Clotilda and conveying them to a place of safety. Unhappily, the timid old man, fearing they would be profaned if they were to fall into the hands of the rabble, resolved to do their work himself and had them burned. Happily the ashes were not lost to France: they were presented by one of the priests of St Geneviève to the little parish church of Saint-Leu, where they are preserved to this day.

The impious mob had imagined that by destroying the mortal remains of the Saint, they would also destroy the devotion she inspired, but they were mistaken, as they always have been. Christianity is

eternal, and to all eternity it will regain possession of its own, as the sea regains possession of its shores. The devotion to St Clotilda flourishes in every part of France. It is particularly strong in all those places where her relics have been preserved,—that is to say, at Les Andelys, Vivières, Chambourcy, and Coeuvres, and also at Courgent and Longpont in the diocese of Versailles.

Paris herself has wished to make reparation to the mother of her kings, and in 1863 one of the finest modern churches of which the city can boast, was erected on the left bank of the Seine. From afar off one can distinguish the graceful twin towers of this noble edifice, their delicate Gothic spires soaring heavenwards, and the church itself, which has been adorned with works of art illustrating the life of the Saint, rises up in its majestic dignity in the midst of one of the most attractive quarters of Paris. The fresh verdure of the trees harmonises pleasantly with the sober tints of the sacred building; all around there flows a busy, and yet peaceful life, and an unflinching piety draws the faithful to worship before the altars of the first Queen of France.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

IN the history of the modern world, St Clotilda occupies a place of honour. Filled with a generous enthusiasm she fought one of the great battles of civilisation, and gained one of its mightiest victories. She triumphed over paganism by wresting her husband from its influence, and she contributed to the foundation of modern society by becoming the most active agent in the conversion of Clovis and his people. Anyone realising how greatly the existence of a Christian Europe has benefited humanity, should bestow a share of his gratitude upon St Clotilda.

So high a measure of fame does not ordinarily fall except where it is due. The great works of Christian civilisation are not the product either of genius or of power: they are the outcome of sanctity. It was the Christian virtues which gave to Clotilda the measure of patient energy and indomitable faith necessary to ensure the salvation of Clovis, and to undertake both to wrest him from paganism and to shield him from heresy. The conversion of the Franks was due to her faith in God, to her resignation under the loss of her child, to her ceaseless prayers. Clovis

would never have invoked *the God of Clotilda* had he not realised both His greatness and His goodness through his wife's virtues. And we should be justified in proclaiming her a Saint, if only for having obtained the baptism of the Frankish nation from God, by the force of her prayers and her tears.

But round every great enterprise there hangs a glory which constitutes a danger to elect souls. To feel a satisfaction in the work they have accomplished, and to forget that the honour is due to God alone, is the rock on which many souls are shipwrecked, who would rise superior to more sordid temptations. The Almighty comes to their rescue by means of adversity, and forces their souls to pass through the crucible of affliction. With what heart-rending sorrows did not Clotilda purchase her imperishable crown! It would seem as though her trials were the ransom of her glory. More than once her soul was pierced as by a sword, and the royal crown of France on which she had laid the cross of Christ was converted in her case into a crown of thorns.

In truth her trials, borne with so heroic a courage, may be taken in their turn as offering new testimonies to her perfection, and fresh titles to eternal glory. Her life became a way of the cross, which she ascended on bruised knees and which brought her each day nearer to heaven. She said an eternal farewell to the joys of this world, and from that time forward her life could be summed up in three words: suffering, prayer, and charity.

But there is no trace of bitterness in the lamentations that issue from the heart of the *chaste dove* as Clotilda has been called by one of her early biographers;¹ they were breathed forth only in communion with God and ascended to Him with her prayers. Even those who inflicted the deepest wounds in her heart did not cause a single drop of bitterness to flow from it. After each of their melancholy exploits she was ready, with silent resignation, to close the wounds that they had made, like a sister of charity on the battle-field who follows in the steps of the combatants to tend the wounded and bury the dead. Day by day she brought her sorrows to the foot of the Cross, and with a fervent act of resignation she offered them to God as a sacrifice of propitiation to obtain grace for her sons and her people. It is in this supreme posture that she appears for the last time in history. Of the triumphant and glorious queen, of the happy spouse of the all-powerful Clovis, of the mother of kings there remains only a sorrowful penitent, spending her nights prostrate before the altar, and herself the innocent victim, expiating crimes that she had not committed.

In bringing our biography of St Clotilda to a close, we cannot disguise from ourselves how much is wanting to the portrait we have attempted to draw. We have undoubtedly been able to efface the more objectionable features which had grown up with popular tradition, and as far as these are concerned we flatter ourselves that our labours have

¹ Le Père Modeste de St Amable, *La Monarchie Chrétienne*.

been conclusive. But we have not possessed the means of restoring the features which have been lost. Her figure appears before us to-day like some beautiful old fresco, rich in golden aureoles and vivid colouring which a decadent age has covered with barbarous whitewash. By the reverent care of modern erudition the outer coating has indeed been removed, but it is impossible to restore all that time and vandalism have destroyed. The most delicate features have disappeared for ever, and it would be mere audacity to pretend to restore them to their pristine charm. That which has happily come down to us, the graceful figure beneath the long widow's veil, the gesture so full of womanly dignity and regal power, the high spirituality revealing the modest beauty of her features, all these are living testimonies which excite the pious veneration of the faithful, and the respect of all.

APPENDIX

ST CLOTILDA AND HISTORICAL CRITICISM

MORE than one reader may have been struck by the various points of difference to be found between the present life of St Clotilda and all preceding biographies. He will have sought in vain for various dramatic episodes which formerly constituted the principal charm of the narrative, such for instance as the story of the saint's espousals. Nor will he have found any record of the supposed crimes of Gondebald against the parents of his niece, nor of the atrocious incitements to vengeance which the latter is said to have addressed to her sons. He will have observed that the character of the queen possesses an unity and a sincerity which were lacking in the traditional portrait, in which she made her appearance at a given moment in the rôle of a virago thirsting for blood. And he may have noted with satisfaction that historical criticism is not necessarily the purely negative power so much dreaded by the credulous hagiographer ; that by destroying long-established legends it is able on occasions to reconstruct a truth of higher value than the legend, and that through it the tender figure of our saint has recovered the halo whose brightness had been dimmed by irreverent traditions. How was it, we may ask, that such extravagant fables were accepted for so long, and that we have had to wait for the nineteenth century before expelling them from history ? The answer is very simple. Until quite recently it had been customary to accept as true and trustworthy in all its details the history of Clovis and Clotilda as it was written by St Gregory of Tours, the father of French history. People said to themselves that, writing in the sixth century, and having been only separated by one or two generations from the subject of his history, and moreover having had at his disposal an immense amount of information drawn from the most trustworthy sources, Gregory was necessarily in a position

to compose a biography, the main lines of which would be of incontestable authenticity.

Unfortunately this was a mistake. Gregory of Tours was undoubtedly a reliable historian whenever he was writing of things of which he had personal knowledge. But as regards events that happened before his own day, his testimony is of no higher value than that of his authorities. We must now examine what authorities were at his disposal for his history of St Clotilda.

A careful examination shows us that the chronicler consulted three separate sources. The first was a life of St Remy, now lost, in which it is highly probable that he found the whole history of the conversion of Clovis and of the events that led up to it: it is from information derived from this source that we have been able to put together chapters III. and IV. His second authority is the local tradition of the Church of Tours, where St Clotilda passed the greater portion of her long widowhood and scattered benefits around her. This tradition was still vivid and intact at the time when Gregory wrote it down some thirty or forty years after the death of the saint;¹ he may have collected it from the lips of more than one old man who might have been personally acquainted with Clovis' widow in his youth, and it offers, like the first, incontestable guarantees of veracity as far at least as Clotilda's life at Tours was concerned.

The third source, unlike the other two, is from every point of view fallacious and untrustworthy: it consists solely of popular legends, often transformed into epic poems, which were handed down by the Frankish people concerning their early kings, and in which Clotilda makes her appearance from time to time. The Franks were a rude half-pagan people, with no comprehension of spiritual matters, and with a inordinate appetite for stories of murder and revenge, with here and there nuptial scenes. And it was by their legends which altered and falsified in an arbitrary manner the facts of history, in order to bring them into harmony with certain conventional types, that many portions of the saint's career have been lamentably disfigured.

It is true that Gregory regarded with a certain suspicion the information which he received from local tradition, but he none

¹ St Clotilda died in 545. Gregory of Tours became bishop of that town in 573, and he wrote his second book, dealing with the history of Clovis, towards the year 576.

the less made use of it whenever it seemed to fill a blank left by written testimony. He has therefore incorporated a portion at least of legendary matter into his history. The chroniclers who came after him such as Fredegarus and the monk of St Denis who wrote the *Liber Historiae* were both more credulous and less scrupulous ; they drew largely on popular sources, and in this way there was introduced into the life of St Clotilda a fabulous element which it is the duty of the historian to reject uncompromisingly. Nevertheless the legends have been accepted so long that the reader will probably be interested in the following brief summary of these primitive tales.

According to St Gregory of Tours, who sums up the legendary tale, while omitting its more improbable features, Gondebald put to the sword his brother, Chilperic, the father of Clotilda, and flung her mother into a well with a stone tied round her neck ; then he exiled the two daughters, one of whom was Clotilda. Later Clovis asked Clotilda in marriage, having heard of her great beauty. Gondebald did not dare to refuse him, and the Frankish ambassadors conducted her in all haste to their master.

Such is the bare outline of the nuptial poem concerning Clovis and Clotilda, from which Gregory of Tours has derived his facts. In order to find a more detailed version of the poem we have to turn to the chronicler Fredegarus, the abbreviator of Gregory, who wrote in the seventh century, and who frequently intercalates in his narrative long episodes taken from popular sources. He writes as follows :

“As Clovis frequently sent ambassadors to Burgundy, he heard through them of the existence of Clotilda. And as it was impossible to see her, Clovis dispatched a Roman called Aurelian, with instructions to penetrate into the presence of the princess by the best available means. Aurelian started on his journey alone, dressed in rags like a beggar, his wallet on his back and bearing with him Clovis’ ring as a token of his good faith. Having arrived at the town of Geneva, where Clotilda resided with her sister, Sedeluba, he was received in a charitable manner by the two sisters, who practised hospitality towards all strangers. While Clotilda was bathing his feet, Aurelian bent towards her and whispered : ‘Lady, I have an important message to deliver if you will deign to receive me in some place where we can talk in secret.’ The princess gave her consent,

and Aurelian, admitted to her presence, addressed her as follows : ' Clovis, my master, has sent me to you ; he desires, if it be the will of God, that you should share his throne, and in order that you may be convinced of his sincerity, here is his ring which he sends you.'

" Clotilda accepted the ring with great joy, and replied : ' Here are a hundred golden pence for your trouble ; take my ring and hasten back to your master, and tell him that if he wishes for my hand in marriage he must send an embassy to my uncle Gondebald to ask for it. Let the ambassadors demand an immediate ratification of the act and let them summon a court in all haste. If they do not hurry I am afraid a certain wise man named Aredius will return from Constantinople before the matter is settled and will frustrate all their schemes.'

" Armed with these instructions Aurelian made his way home in the same costume as before. Near the frontiers of the kingdom of Orleans and not far from his own house, he met a poor beggar who joined him on his journey. Aurelian having unsuspectingly gone to sleep, his comrade stole his wallet with the golden pennies. On waking up and discovering his loss he was filled with anger, and hurried to his house whence he dispatched his servants in all directions to look for the thief. They succeeded in catching him and brought him before Aurelian, who ordered him to be severely flogged three days in succession and then released. He subsequently made his way to Clovis at Soissons, and told him everything that had happened. Clovis, enchanted by the intelligence and resourcefulness displayed by Clotilda, sent at once to Gondebald to demand the hand of his niece in marriage. Gondebald not daring to refuse him, and hoping to contract a friendly alliance with the conqueror, gave the required promise. The envoys having offered the *sou* and the *denier*, according to Frankish custom, declared Clotilda to be betrothed to Clovis, and demanded the immediate convocation of a court at which she could be officially married to their master. The court was held without delay and preparations for the marriage ceremony were made at Châlons. As soon as the Frankish envoys received the princess from the hands of Gondebald they placed her in a covered cart, secured her rich dowry, and started homewards. But Clotilda foresaw the speedy return of Aredius from the East, and said to the leader of the Franks : ' If you wish me to reach

your master in safety let me alight from this cart and put me on a horse, and then let us proceed with all haste to your kingdom. I am convinced that I shall never see your king if I remain in this cart.' The Franks obeyed her and placed her on horseback and they travelled with all speed to the court of Clovis.

"Meanwhile Aredius, having disembarked at Marseilles, learnt what had happened and hastened northwards. Having reached the Burgundian court, Gondebald addressed him as follows: 'You know that I have made friends with the Franks and that I have given my niece Clotilda in marriage to Clovis.'—'It will not prove to be a bond of friendship,' replied Aredius, 'but a source of perpetual enmity. You should have remembered, Sire, that you put to the sword your brother Chilperic, the father of Clotilda, that you flung her mother into the water with a stone tied round her neck, and that you threw her two brothers down a well after having cut off their heads. If she becomes a powerful queen she will avenge her relations. I beseech you therefore send an army in pursuit of her to bring her back. It is far better that you should bring about an immediate quarrel with Clovis and be done with it, than that you and yours should be the perpetual victims of Frankish vengeance.'

"On hearing these words Gondebald sent an army in pursuit of Clotilda, but they only succeeded in finding the cart and the dowry, of which they took possession. When Clotilda arrived in the neighbourhood of Villery, in the district of Troyes, where Clovis held his court, she begged her escort before leaving Burgundian territory to pillage and burn the country for a distance of twelve miles round. The deed having been accomplished by the permission of the king, Clotilda exclaimed: 'I give Thee thanks, Almighty God, that I have been enabled to be present at the first act of vengeance on behalf of my parents and my brothers.'"¹

This popular and barbarous legend, which does not take into account in any degree the religious differences that existed between Clovis and Clotilda, did not long satisfy French Catholics. Other narrators who were mainly occupied in reducing the legend to greater harmony with Christian ideas and gallo-roman customs, have presented a text containing notable variations. It

¹ G. Kurth, *Histoire Poétique des Mérovingiens*, p. 227-230, according to the chronicle of Fredegarus, Book III., ch. xviii-xix.

was a monk of St Denis, who, writing in the beginning of the eighth century, has preserved for us what I may term the monastic version in contradistinction to the foregoing.

According to the *Liber Historiae*, Clovis, hearing reports of Clotilda's beauty, sent Aurelian to ask her hand in marriage. Now, Clotilda was a Christian. One Sunday when she was on her way to Mass, Aurelian, disguised in ragged clothes, sat in the midst of the beggars who gathered round the sacred precincts, having left his own clothes in the hands of his companions in the neighbouring forest. After Mass, Clotilda, according to her wont, began to distribute alms. Arriving in front of Aurelian she placed a gold coin in his hand. He, on his side, kissed the hand of the princess and dragged at her skirt. Having returned to her room she summoned the stranger to her presence. Aurelian held Clovis' ring in his hand, but he put down his wallet which contained all the betrothal jewels behind the door of Clotilda's room.

"Tell me, young man," asked Clotilda, "why do you pretend to be poor, and why did you give a pull to my skirt?"

"Your servant," replied Aurelian, "desires to speak to you in private."

"Well, speak."

"My master Clovis, King of the Franks, has sent me to you, because he wishes you to become his queen. Here are the ring and the rest of the royal jewels."

Saying these words he looked behind the door of the apartment for his wallet, but it was no longer there and he was filled with grief. Clotilda joined him in his search, and asked: "Who has carried away the wallet of this poor man?" At last the wallet was found, and Aurelian handed over the ornaments to Clotilda in secret. As for Clovis' ring, she deposited it for safety in her uncle's treasury. "Salute Clovis from me," she said, "and say that it is not permitted to a Christian to wed a heathen. Be careful that no one learns anything of this. The future is in the hands of the Lord, my God, whose name I will proclaim before the whole world. As for you, go in peace." Aurelian returned home and repeated to his master all that had occurred.

In the following year Clovis dispatched his ambassador Aurelian to ask Gondebald for the hand of Clotilda, his betrothed. On

hearing this, Gondebald was much alarmed and said : " All my counsellors and my Burgundian friends must know that Clovis is seeking a quarrel with me for he has never seen my niece. As for you," he said to Aurelian, " you came spying here to see what was going on at our court. Go back to your master and say that his lies are of no avail when he pretends to refer to my niece as his betrothed."

Then Aurelian replied firmly, " This is the message that my lord Clovis sends to you. If you will give him his bride, select a spot whence he can come and take her : if not, he will come and ask the reason why at the head of his army."

" Let him come where he pleases," Gondebald retorted, " and I also will put myself at the head of my Burgundians. He will be the victim of the ruin he has brought upon others, and the blood he has shed so recklessly will be avenged."

Hearing their king speak in such terms, his Burgundian counsellors were filled with alarm and said to him : " Let the king make enquiries of his servants and his chamberlains lest perchance by some trickery the envoys of Clovis may have offered the betrothal gifts ; we must be careful lest he have a pretext against us, for the wrath of Clovis is terrible."

Such was the advice which, according to custom, the Burgundians tendered to their king. Search was made as they suggested, and in the royal treasury they found Clovis' ring with his stamp and his inscription. Then Gondebald, filled with grief, interrogated his niece.

" I know, my Lord King," she replied, " that some years ago the envoys of Clovis brought us some gold presents ; to me, your servant, they presented a little ring which I placed in your treasury."

" You acted very heedlessly," replied Gondebald, and with much indignation and ill-will he handed her over to Aurelian. The envoy received her with great delight, and accompanied by his escort he brought her to the court of Clovis at Soissons. The Frankish king, full of joy, married her without delay.

On the evening of the wedding-day, before they had retired to the nuptial couch, Clotilda, like a prudent and God-fearing woman said to her husband :

" My Lord King, hearken to your servant and deign to grant her request before our marriage is consummated."

"Ask what you will," replied Clovis, "and it shall be granted you."

"First of all, she said, "I would beg of you to worship God the Father who created you, then our Lord Jesus Christ, who redeemed you, who is the King of kings and who was sent by His Father from on high; then the Holy Ghost who confirms and illumines the just. Confess their ineffable and indivisible majesty, and their co-eternal omnipotence, and confessing it, abandon your vain idols which are not gods but only miserable statues; burn them, and restore the holy churches which you have destroyed by fire. Then remember, I beseech you, that you are bound to demand the inheritance of my father and mother, whom my uncle Gondebald put to a cruel death, and whose blood God will avenge."

Clovis replied, "One of the things you ask, *i.e.*, that I should abjure my gods and adore yours is sufficiently difficult. As for the rest I will do all I can."

To which his wife answered, "I beseech you above all things to adore God Almighty who is in heaven."

Thereupon Clovis sent Aurelian once more to Burgundy to demand Clotilda's dowry from Gondebald. The latter was filled with anger and exclaimed: "Have I not forbidden you, Aurelian to come spying about in my kingdom? I swear, by the salvation of princes, that if you do not take your immediate departure and go home, I will kill you myself."

Aurelian retorted: "Long live the Lord Clovis my king and the Franks who are with him. I do not fear your threats as long as my lord is upon earth. This is the message that your son Clovis sends you: he will come himself to demand the dowry of our sovereign lady, his wife."

Once again the Burgundians according to their custom gave Gondebald advice, and said, "Give back to your niece a portion of the treasure that is due to her; it will be an act of justice, and through it you will secure peace and the friendship of Clovis and of the Frankish nation; if not they will invade our country, for they are a powerful and warlike nation and do not fear God."

Impressed by this advice Gondebald handed over to Aurelian, for Clovis, a considerable portion of his treasury, consisting of gold, silver and jewelry, asking at the same time: "What is

left me save to divide my kingdom itself with Clovis?" And he added to Aurelian, "Go back to your master and convey to him all these riches which you have acquired without labour."

And Aurelian replied, "My master Clovis is your son: all your possessions are held in common."

And the wise men of Burgundy said to one another: "Long live the king who has such servants."

Aurelian returned to France with a considerable quantity of treasure.

This then, in two very dissimilar versions, is the legend of the marriage of Clovis and Clotilda. To-day it must be regarded as struck out of history. Its striking improbability, the contradictions between the two versions even in essential particulars, the resemblance between this and all other nuptial legends that have come down to us from the Middle Ages, and which are all moulded on one and the same model, and in a word, the impossibility of reconciling it with known historical fact, furnish more than sufficient reason for relegating it to the domain of fiction. For fuller details on the subject I would refer the curious reader to pages 225-251 of my *Histoire Poétique des Mérovingien*.

Let it suffice here for me to point out briefly that Gondebald was not the murderer of his brother and his sister-in-law. On the authority of St Avitus of Vienne we know that he mourned over the death of Chilperic. As for Caretena, we know from her epitaph that she survived until the year 506 and that she died in her bed many years after Clotilda's marriage. Consequently the whole legend of Clotilda's wrongs and her supposed revenge falls to the ground. And when the Frankish chronicler assures us that after the death of Clovis Clotilda urged on her sons to make war against Burgundy, in order to avenge her wrongs, he is merely repeating a legend which had already received popular acceptance, and the imaginary character of which has only been demonstrated in our own day.

As we have already shown that Clotilda had no parents to avenge, no further evidence is necessary in order to reject this portion of the story. Moreover, even assuming that it was not disproved by negative arguments, the legend is of so improbable a character that it would be impossible for the historical critic to accept it. If Clotilda was so eager for vengeance why did she not urge the duty on her husband Clovis, and why did she wait

for the death of Gondebald in order to vent her wrath upon the innocent son of the latter ?

It is true that Clovis made war against Burgundy, but not at the instigation of Clotilda : the campaign was undertaken solely at the request of Godigisil, the other uncle and the presumptive guardian of his wife ; and so little was it in Clovis' mind to avenge Clotilda that at the very time when Gondebald was on the point of surrendering at discretion he withdrew his army on the promise of an annual tribute. Even when Gondebald failed to keep his promise, Clovis did not take up arms against him ; more than this, he shortly after concluded an alliance with him, and all this under the very eyes of Clotilda just at the time of his own conversion to Christianity, when we may presume that his wife's influences was most potent with him.

If Clotilda had wrongs to avenge it must be confessed that she forgot them very quickly. She forgot them indeed as long as their author Gondebald was alive ; she forgot them during the lifetime of Clovis who was their natural avenger ; and it was only after both offender and offended had been in their graves the one during nine and the other during twelve years, and when there was nobody to punish, that we are asked to believe that this pious widow, living in retirement and devoting herself to good works, separated from her sons and peacefully awaiting death, suddenly bethought herself to crown a life filled with good works by initiating a fratricidal war in which her own flesh and blood were to perish.¹

At the present day it is not only possible to demonstrate the falseness of the legend which has clouded Clotilda's memory, but also to trace its origin. It is to be found in the universal tendency of the popular mind to explain great misfortunes as being the expiation of great crimes. When Sigismund, king of Burgundy, was killed with his wife and children by his cousin Clodomir, it was supposed that he must have perished in expiation of some similar crime which one of his ancestors had perpetrated against some member of Clodomir's family. And hence it was easy to assume that Gondebald had inflicted on Chilperic, the grandfather of Clodomir, the same treatment as, at a later date, Clodomir had inflicted on his son. The reader can see in my *Histoire Poétique des Mérovingiens* (pp. 245 and following) how

¹ G. Kurth *Histoire Poétique des Mérovingiens*, p. 327.

this poetical hypothesis has been successively developed until it has become, so to speak, the pivot and centre of the whole legend.

Historic truth, which in our own day has been restored to its rightful position, has put everything into its proper place; it has allowed only indisputable facts to survive in the authentic biography of Clotilda and has relegated the rest to poetic fiction. On this occasion at least hagiography can defend the legitimacy of its traditions in the name of science, while on the other hand we have the amusing spectacle of rationalistic learning, engaged in angry argument against the conclusions of the critical method. Can it be true that in the estimation of certain historians the legends which glorify the saints are the only ones to be struck out, while those that calumniate them are to be preserved with pious care?

It is vain to bring forward philosophic considerations in order to dispute Clotilda's right to the title of saint which has been conferred on her by the Church and been preserved to her by history. Clotilda, it has been said, participated in the barbarian society in which she dwelt; she breathed its corrupt atmosphere; she was affected by its violent passions, and it is running in the face of all probability to pretend that she could escape unscathed from the many influences that surrounded her. If we were to conclude from that that Clotilda was not worthy of the title of saint, then we must add that there were no saints at all in the sixth century, nor indeed in any other.

But surely all can see how easy it is to go astray when once we begin to produce general reasons with which to combat particular facts. Great virtue and great passion belong to all ages and all climes, and that which we are agreed to call the social *milieu* consists, although in varying proportions, of all the good and all the bad elements of civilisation. Both the highest sanctity and the basest immorality may be found there, and the only difference between one society and another lies in the degrees of proportion according to which these contending elements are mingled. Therefore it is quite possible for Clotilda to have been a saint, although sanctity did not flourish among her immediate surroundings. The greatest saints have often appeared in most troublous times, and the hagiographers of the Middle Ages, accustomed to the phenomenon, had invented a special figure of speech to explain it: society, they said, had produced this exquisite soul as the thorn puts forth a rose, *sicut spina rosam*.

We are therefore doing no violence either to history or to philosophy in maintaining as we have done that Clotilda appeared on the rugged trunk of sixth-century barbarism as a rose scented with all the sweet odours of sanctity. She is neither the only nor the most marvellous female saint of the period. Not to mention St Genevieve, did not the tender charm of the virtues of St Radegonda perfume the annals of a century fertile in crimes, and did not this attractive saint, the descendant of fratricides, share the conjugal couch of the loathsome Clothair I.? And yet the personality of St Radegonda is unquestionably one of the most authentic and best known of her century: all the light that history has preserved for us concerning that time seems to converge upon her, for her life was written by two biographers who were intimately acquainted with her, without counting Gregory of Tours himself, who numbered himself among her respectful admirers.

Let us conclude.

Simple common sense tells us that Clotilda could be a saint in spite of her surroundings, and the testimony of the Church goes to prove that such was indeed the case. As to criticism, it has reduced to nothing the contradictory testimony which was supposed to be contained in the popular legends. There only remains for every honest man to make amends to a saintly memory which has been too long clouded over by the false fictions of barbarian genius.

G. K.

Page 53. In earlier times, even in the west, Confirmation was administered to infants together with baptism, of which it is a complement. The separation of the two rites has no theological significance, and is probably due to the fact that baptism which, like the Eucharist, was originally administered only by the bishop at stated times, was delegated to the inferior clergy who were not ordinarily the competent ministers of Confirmation, which was accordingly deferred till the bishop's services could be secured.

Page 56. St Geneviève, the patroness of Paris, lived between the years 422-3 and 512. She was born at Nanterre, and, while yet a mere child, attracted the attention of St Germanus by her

sanctity. At his hands she subsequently received the veil of consecrated virginity and made the usual religious vows. As was the custom of that time, she continued to live in the world, for the religious life is not necessarily conventual or monastic. Later, she was entrusted with the spiritual training of other virgins similarly conditioned. The miracles attributed to her in life and after death are endless in variety and number. She seems to have been an ecstasica and to have possessed a singular power of thought-reading and prophetic insight. When Attila's approach created a panic in Paris, her assurances of Divine protection succeeded in restoring confidence and saving the city. It is probably this incident that pointed her out as the natural patroness of the French capital.

G. T.

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